WE GOT THE POWER: ASIAN AMERICANS AND HIP-HOP CULTURE IN THE BAY AREA

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation investigates how Asian Americans of the Bay Area engage hip-hop culture as fans and artists. This is a historiography of Asian Americans participating in Bay Area hip-hop culture that has been masked or hidden. I have devised a methodology less reliant on archival materials (i.e., vinyl records and compact discs) that details the different types of data needed to establish a history of Asian Americans participating in Bay Area hip-hop culture. Data collected facilitates the understanding of how Asian Americans engage hip-hop culture by documenting their participation as emcees, DJs, breakdancers, and graffiti artists.

Dedicated to my students.

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> *I'm squatting beneath a wooden record rack flipping through boxes of used vinyl records. With each flip, I quickly scan information from sleeve jackets: producers, musicians, instruments, labels, year and place of recording. Occasionally, I pause, place a record in a stack, and resume flipping through the remainder of the crate. When complete, I check the vinyl for wear and tear and decide on my purchases. After paying for my finds, I notice a thick layer of dust and dirt on the tips of my fingers. Crate diggers (vernacular for those looking for records within hip-hop culture) refer to this as "dusty fingers." I rip open an antiseptic wipe and sanitize my fingers before heading home to listen to my finds.*

Among my collection are a number of compact discs and vinyl records which speak to the appeal of Asian American emcees. For example, while Asiatic Knight Stalker's self-released *Love's Criminal* (2006) might be cited as an example of Asian American emcees being regulated to the hip-hop underground, other emcees have occasionally garnered acceptance from the mainstream. Fresh Kid Ice, a Chinese and Jamaican American emcee of The 2 Live Crew, for instance, appeared on a number of releases on the Luke Skkywalker Records imprint from the mid-1980s to 1998. Furthermore, the release of *Funky New Nation* (1990) by the Samoan American hip-hop group Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E. by 4th and Broadway suggests occasional support of by mainstream record companies.

Contemporary efforts by Jin and the Black Eyed Peas provide clues into the marketability of emcees of Asian Pacific Islander descent. Although the poor performance of Jin's *The Rest is*

History (2004) suggests that the mainstream is not ready for an emcee of Chinese ancestry, Apl.de.ap's participation within the Black Eyed Peas suggests emcees of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry are more appealing to audiences if they are a part of multiracial and multiethnic crews. The group's diverse lineup – black, Filipino, Mexican, Native American and white – confirms this. Apl.de.ap's mixed ancestry (Filipino and African American) has surfaced in the "The Apl song" (2003) and "Bebot" (2005) two songs which highlight the Filipino American experience.

Asian American involvement in hip-hop is overshadowed by perceptions of the culture being predominately black. The defense of hip-hop as a black cultural endeavor by African American critics and hip-hop artists alike sets a standard of authenticity based upon race.[1] Asians, more often than not, are considered to be topics of and not agents of hip-hop culture and a number of releases by black emcees confirm this idea.[2] As a result, Asian American participation is often hidden and requires researching ancestries to provide proof of involvement.[3]

Hip-hop culture is the battleground in which artists strategically employ their ethnic identities to forge an Asian American identity. In other words, these artists initially mask their ethnic heritage(s) until stardom is achieved. JabbaWockeez, the winners of *America's Best Dance Crew* (2008), utilized masks to refocus energies on their skills rather than their racial identity. Likewise, the Invisibl Skratch Picklz (ISP) routinely wore masks on their releases to avoid questions regarding their ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, graffiti culture provided a greater degree of anonymity for Asian American writers such as Dream, Pak1, and Spie.

Despite the strategic masking of ethnicity, the Bay Area is home to a vibrant hip-hop scene in which Asian Americans have long participated. From legends Crayone and DJ Qbert to current emcee Kiwi Illafonte, Filipino Americans have a long legacy of taking part in the culture.

In addition, Fists of Fury, Bored Stiff (featuring Equipto and Mint Rock), Dan the Automator, Lyrics Born, and Emcee T, all represent crews and artists of Asian Pacific Islander descent. The aforementioned artists all have a strong Asian American fan-base and they are often cited as proof that Asian Americans contribute to hip-hop culture.

Asian American emcees face a tremendous amount of scrutiny as compared to their hip-hop contemporaries (i.e., graffiti artists, DJs, and breakdancers). Jin, for example, a Chinese American rapper famous for winning BET's *106 and Park* freestyle competition, became the subject of much debate based upon his ethnicity.[4] As a result, issues of race and authenticity within hip-hop came to the forefront and unfortunately misdirect attentions from the real question: why do Asian Americans listen to hip-hop?[5]

Developing a "Digging" Methodology

An appropriate methodology must be devised in order to investigate why Asian Americans are fans and/or agents of hip-hop culture. Within this section, I will develop a framework for the investigation of Asian Americans participating in hip-hop culture by formulating a methodology based upon crate digging. By highlighting two types of "diggers" – Collectors and DJs – I will reveal how their collection of vinyl records provides the opportunity to formulate a comprehensive framework of investigation.

Crate diggers participate within the larger vinyl collecting community; however, a distinction must be made between collectors and DJs since they utilize vinyl differently.[6] Collectors go to great lengths to protect their collections by using the correct needles, expensive cleaners, and proper handling techniques to ensure the longevity of their prized vinyl. DJs, on the other hand, use vinyl as a tool within a performance and/or production – not as a valuable

commodity. DJs touch and/or manipulate (i.e., scratch) their vinyl on turntables and such techniques figure into every collector's imagination as a nightmare. However, for the DJ, a collector's prized collection represents an untapped resource that can be utilized in a production and/or performance.

Taylor (2003) notes that material evidence such as vinyl records exists as a form of "archival memory" that some people believe is resistant to change.[7] DJs, however, challenge this assumption by utilizing vinyl to reference the past in order to create new sounds by accessing the rich catalog of recordings that stretch across a number of musical genres. In turn, these new sounds reflect the social and political reality of the artists. DJs also use vinyl in performances that Taylor describes as a "repertoire." Thus, DJs embody the intersection of archive and repertoire in that they utilize the archive in performance by scratching, mixing, records, CDs or mp3s.

Taylor's concept of the archive and repertoire evokes the possibility of constructing a framework for the investigation of Asian Americans in hip-hop culture through the consideration of both material evidence and performance. Such material evidence—vinyl records, concert fliers, music videos, compact discs, mp3s, websites, and photographs—can further the understanding of how people of Asian Pacific Islander descent engage hip-hop culture. To provide a comprehensive historiography of Asian American participation, however, we must also consider the actual performances. Participant observation is vital since it provides in-roads to gatekeepers of the scene that can lead to interviews. This framework which I call "digging" details a number of steps one must follow in order to successfully erect a historiography of Asian American involvement within hip-hop culture. The following sections describe what types of

data "digging" can yield and have been separated into two sections: material evidence and participant observation.

Material Evidence

The collection of material evidence is crucial to the understanding of how peoples of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry engage Bay Area hip-hop culture as artists. By analyzing records, fliers, videos, and lyrics, I will reveal how such items demonstrate their participation within the Bay Area scene. Such evidence reveals the appeal of Asian American hip-hop artists, cross-cultural collaborations, and the use of social networking sites to promote their works.

An analysis of releases by Asian American hip-hop artists of the Bay Area reveals their collaborations with African Americans. "Da Music" (2005) by Lunar Heights, for example, features Filipino American emcee Jern Eye standing between African American emcees Khai Sharrieff and Spear of the Nation posing in front of iconic downtown Oakland buildings. The album notes reveal that Filipino American DJ Vinroc of the Triple Threat and 5th Platoon DJ crews produced the album. This information inspires the further online investigation of the backgrounds of the artists of Filipino ancestry and reveals that both musicians relocated from other metropolitan areas (Los Angeles and New York) to the Bay Area.

The collaborations between African and Asian Americans in hip-hop continue a long tradition of the communities working together to release recordings. For example, Glide Memorial Church's release *You The People: Celebrating with Glide's Cecil Williams* (1971) features a number of gospel songs, spoken word pieces, and sermons from Reverend Cecil Williams. A quick analysis of the front and reverse covers reveal an undeniable Bay Area

aesthetic of social activism stemming from the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements indicated by the use of Third World liberation rhetoric and its reference to the Black Panther Party and the United Farm Workers Organization. Upon further investigation a photo reveals a woman of Asian ancestry smiling alongside a black man playing a guitar. The woman's identity may be considered trivial to some; however, her identity is of importance since she was one of the forerunners of Asian American poetry – Janice Mirikitani. The liner notes reveal that Janice is "active in third world movements, and is an accomplished poet." She reads the piece entitled "A Revolutionary Message, "Quotations from Chairman Jesus" without accompaniment. Her vocal delivery evokes the power of Nikki Giovanni and provides opportunity for investigating the intersections between Third World liberation movements and in particular the relationships between African and Asian American activists.

The collection of event fliers provides clues into the types of audiences Asian Americans hip-hop artists of the Bay Area attract. For example, a flier for *Stop the Killings!* (2007) advertises performances by Geologic of Blue Scholars and Kiwi of Native Guns to raise awareness about human rights abuses occurring in the Philippines. In addition, the flier for *Kilusan Underground Sound Session* (K.U.S.S.) (2011) hosted by the League of Filipino Students (LFS) at San Francisco State University represents a continuance of culturally-activated Filipino Americans utilizing hip-hop to educate their audiences. Both fliers suggest a hip-hop audience grounded in Third World Liberation politics; however, another flier also indicates Asian American emcees participating within the Hyphy Movement. "Hyphy" is Bay Area slang for hyperactive and was coined by Bay Area rapper Keak Da Sneak in the early 1990s. Hyphy became the genre identified with the Bay Area hip-hop scene as did G-funk in Los Angeles and Crunk in the South. Nump, a Filipino American hyphy emcee signed to E-40's Sick Wid It

record label, is featured as an artist attending an autograph signing at the Shoe Palace in San Jose, California (2010). The emcee's appearance suggests an appeal beyond college-educated Asian American audiences; however the inclusion of other emcees and singers of Asian Pacific Islander descent suggests a supportive pan-Asian network.[8]

Digging in the digital age reveals cultural productions by Asian American hip-hop artists found on social networking websites (i.e., Facebook, MySpace, and Youtube) and an investigation of their videos reveals a variety of genres in which they participate. The following examples speak to the heterogeneous composition of the Bay Area hip-hop scene. For example, EyeASage's *MRSHMLO* (2009) reveals a staunch independent stance that shuns the mainstream hip-hop's preoccupation with misogyny and violence. On the other hand, Mistah Roger's *Down For Our City* (2011) features Southeast Asian American emcees clothed in Oakland Raiders and Oakland Athletics sportswear rapping about East Oakland pride punctuated by scenes youth posing with handguns and automatic rifles. *I Go, You Stop* (2007) by the Gookstaz features emcees of Southeast Asian descent contributing to the Bay Area Hyphy Movement.

The analysis of lyrics by Asian American hip-hop artists provides insight into how they engage hip-hop culture as fans and later emcees. For example, "1995" (2006) by Native Guns, a Filipino American hip-hop duo of Kiwi and Bambu based in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, features lyrics which documents each emcees immersion in hip-hop culture as youth growing up in Los Angeles. The song features Bambu rapping about stealing his first "NWA (Niggaz With Attitude) tape at ten" years of age and listening to Rodney O and Joe Cooley, inspiring him to become an emcee. Likewise, Kiwi raps about reading *Urb* magazine (an independent hip-hop magazine based in California), rappers KRS One and Chuck D, and becoming inspired to become an emcee.

In sum, the collection of material evidence is pivotal to the understanding of how peoples of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry participate within Bay Area hip-hop culture and such evidence warrants further analysis. The collection of fliers provides information on how Asian Americans emcees market their events but also the composition of their audiences. An analysis of music videos speaks to the variety of genres Asian American emcees participate in. Contemporary evidence found online infers that social networking sites play a pivotal role in the understanding of Asian American hip-hop artists. Such evidence in combination with hip-hop releases provides an undeniable record of participation.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is pivotal to capture the Asian American hip-hop scene and my personal experiences have led to many of the scene's gatekeepers. In this section, I will highlight how my experiences as an organizer, volunteer, DJ, graffiti artist and community health worker speak to the influence hip-hop culture has on Asian Americans in the Bay Area.

For the last twenty years, I have organized many events that cater to Asian American audiences in the Bay Area. For example, in the early 1990s, I was a member of the Asian Pacific Islander Student Association at Laney College in Oakland, California. As an organizer, I hired FM20 – a predominately Filipino American DJ crew – to perform at an Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month event held on campus. FM20 later became the world famous Invisibl Skratch Piklz (ISP). At the same event, I hired Korean American rap duo Fists of Fury. This group is significant in that they received accolades from black emcee and producer Paris during the Los

Angeles Uprisings stemming from the beating of Rodney King despite the wrath Koreatown faced from the disenfranchised.

My experiences as a volunteer for Asian American community based organizations revealed an emerging interest in hip-hop music from their audiences. While volunteering at a number of fundraisers for Asian American Theater Company in San Francisco during the early 1990s, I witnessed two acts – Anonymous and Incite – which represented two differing camps of hip-hop: commercial and underground. Incite, a predominately Japanese American crew from Southern California, rapped with a crowd pleasing energy influenced by mainstream hip-hop artists. On the other hand, Anonymous, a Korean American emcee, rapped about political issues which failed to resonate with audience members. For example, during one fundraiser he shouted "Fuck George Washington!" His anger was met with silence and soon the rapper and his crew were ushered off the stage. In addition, Art Hirahara, a Japanese American emcee performed a number of tunes which resonated with audience members seeking political rap songs. I vividly recall the emcee performing a song entitled "Uncommon Ground" which addressed social inequities with the vocal prowess of Public Enemy's Chuck D.

Inspired by ISP, I purchased a number of second hand turntables and a cheap two-channel mixer to pursue DJ-ing. I began purchasing records at flea markets, thrift stores and record shops and soon these purchases found their way into mixtapes I made for friends. Later, I met a number of fellow DJs of Asian Pacific Islander descent and these relationships led to DJ-ing many house parties during the 1990s. These relationships later culminated in a number of DJ-ing gigs in the Bay Area during the 2000s.

My pursuit of DJ-ing coincided with an immersion in the Bay Area's graffiti scene during the 1990s. During this period, Asian American graffiti artists such as Barry "Twist" McGee,

Spie, Pak 1 and Dream rose to prominence and their works inspired me to write (vernacular within the "graf" scene describing the act of spray painting and/or tagging). While living in San Francisco's Chinatown, I purchased spray cans from the local dime store and went on nightly jaunts through alleyways spraying my tags and characters on whatever surface I could find. This led to my introduction to the HMP (Her Most Precious) crew that was predominately comprised of women of Asian Pacific Islander descent. I also went tagging with fellow Asian American writer NYA during my undergraduate years at SFSU. Such alliances suggest a supportive pan-Asian network amongst its graffiti writers.

My collective experiences led to my involvement in hip-hop organizing for youth. As a community health worker for Asian Health Services in Oakland's Chinatown, my coworkers and I developed an innovative afterschool program that combined health education with hip-hop workshops that taught participants various skills such as breaking, emcee-ing, and DJ-ing. Such experiences not only speak to the influence hip-hop culture has on Asian American youth but also the coordinators of the program since the majority of us listened to hip-hop while growing up in the Bay Area.

My immersion within the Bay Area hip-hop scene influences the direction of this study. Being immersed within the scene has fostered relationships with gatekeepers that have resulted in a number of interviews. My participation in social activist circles, in addition, has influenced this study by instilling a sense of urgency, purpose, and more importantly a desire to accurately portray the scene.

In order to interrogate why Asian Americans have an affinity for hip-hop culture, I have collected a number of oral histories from participants residing in the Bay Area. In addition, I have participated and observed a number of events ranging from DJ-ing weddings, attending

nightclubs and concerts, and participating in community based organizations and protests. Fieldwork conducted has offered insights into how hip-hop culture plays out in the lives of Asian Americans in the Bay Area.

For this study, I have decided to employ the term "scene" to capture the Bay Area's vibrant hip-hop culture.[9] In so doing, I will reveal how Asian Americans participate within hip-hop collectives, community based organizations, and/or events, in addition to producing cultural products (i.e., music and videos). Thus, this study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the Bay Area hip-hop scene beyond the analysis of hip-hop releases.

This study showcases Asian Americans contributions to hip-hop culture by *creating* works as graffiti artists, DJs, breakdancers, and/or emcees. This is not a study on "Asian American hip-hop" because labeling it as such would define and demarcate what "Asian American hip-hop" is.[10] As one interview argued, "there is no such thing as Asian American music since we are influenced by so much."[11] Indeed, many interviewees expressed multiple reasons for becoming fans of and later agents of hip-hop culture.

The first chapter focuses on Asian American identity and cultural production. Within this chapter, I argue that Asian American identity is inextricably tied to the homeland and fosters a sense of diasporic nostalgia among Asian Americans and manifests throughout hip-hop cultural productions referencing the mother country. Such notions of nostalgia are amplified during times of crisis and I highlight how the response to Typhoon Ondoy (2009) showcases diasporic nostalgia in action.

In chapter two, I argue that the model minority myth affects Asian Americans operating within hip-hop by upholding the dominant racial paradigm that privileges whiteness over other racial categories, especially blackness. By showcasing contemporary tensions and collaborations

between Asian Americans and African Americans in the Bay Area, I will reveal how such incidents influence Asian Americans perceptions of hip-hop culture through the utility of blackness.

The next three chapters reveal the legacy of Asian American hip-hop artists throughout the pillars of hip-hop culture (i.e., DJ-ing, graffiti, and breakdancing). Emcees (rappers) are prominently featured throughout this study, but I have chosen to devote chapters to Asian American DJs, graffiti artists, and breakdancers to provide a more inclusive reading of hip-hop culture that embraces its less championed counterparts.

Authenticity figures prominently within hip-hop discourse and the final chapter problematizes the establishment of a singular Asian American hip-hop aesthetic. This chapter reveals the variety genres in which Asian American hip-hop emcees participate and how authenticity manifests in their releases. Authenticity plays a prominent role in hip-hop organizing and education programs of the Bay Area, and this chapter sheds light into how credibility and hip-hop knowledge figures into these efforts.

Later, while spinning my vinyl finds, I come to realization of how DJ-ing, serves as a metaphor for Asian American voices within hip-hop culture. Cueing one record while another plays, mirrors my interviewees responses, carefully arranged throughout the text. As I mix, the voices briefly come together merging into something new but retaining the elements of each before fading into the next track. As the next record plays, I squat below shuffling, like I did before, looking for that perfect beat, that particular hook, or vocal. And somehow, it all comes together, through trial and error, from adding and subtracting, mixing and adjusting. This is the end result.

Chapter One: Asian American Identity: Diasporic Nostalgia and Cultural Production

Asian American identity is rooted both in the national experience of "being Asian" in the United States and the international experience of immigration and colonialism. The social historical context of the term "Asian American" reveals that its creation was in direct correlation to the anti-Vietnam war movement.[12] Furthermore, its creation reveals a claiming of America and an acknowledgement of the homeland. Zhou and Lee (2004) write:

> Coined by the late historian and activist Yuji Ichioka, 'Asian American' was a term initially used to describe a politically charge group identity in the ethnic consciousness movements of the late 1960s. This self-proclaimed category emerged to reject the Western-imposed category 'Oriental' and to fight invisibility. Today, 'Asian American' is widely considered an umbrella term that includes native- and foreign-born U.S. citizens and permanent residents from Asia (east of Pakistan) or who have ancestors from this region. Asian-origin Americans, especially those of East Asian origins who have long been dubbed Oriental, adopt the pan-ethnic label because of convenience and because other Americans cannot and often do not even try to make ethnic distinctions, despite vast differences in national origin, religion, language, and culture. Moreover, the pan-ethnic label has become instrumental for political mobilization and activism.[13]

Asian American identity therefore stakes claim to America while simultaneously acknowledging one's homeland.

For Asian Americans the notion of the homeland poses questions to their identities that ultimately manifest in cultural productions. Peoples of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry create

works referencing both their respective homelands and the United States that are marked by a nostalgic longing for the mother country. For some this eventually leads to returning to the home country. Asian American identity, therefore, epitomizes the concept of a dual presence. In combination, these acts acknowledge both the domestic and international spheres – a phenomenon that I describe as diasporic nostalgia.

Nostalgia is not limited to cultural productions, but also interactions facilitated by affordable travel and the proliferation of technology (i.e., the Internet, cell phones, and faxes) that ultimately disrupt our notions of "here" and "there."[14] Machida (2009) writes,

> [a]s relatively inexpensive air transportation and access to powerful communications and media technologies made it possible for migrants to more easily travel back and forth between their many points of origin and the United States and also to maintain strong ongoing connections to distant homelands, migration became a more mutable phenomenon.[15]

Thus, the act of migration, in recent years, has become a less traumatic experience since communication between family members and friends occurs with relative ease due to advances in technology. This situation has ultimately influenced an Asian American identity that is characterized by a nostalgic longing for the homeland. The homeland figures prominently into the lives of Asian Americans particularly in times of crisis in which Asian Americans aided by social networking websites direct relief efforts towards the mother country.

For this chapter, I will apply the concept of diasporic nostalgia in a number of ways. First, I will explore interviewees' perception of their identities through recollections of migrating to and settling in the United States followed by the act of returning home. Second, I will analyze the releases of Filipino American hip-hop artists referencing the Philippines through imagery

and/or lyrics that showcase an emergent trend of Asian American identity – an identity that straddles both the international and the domestic spheres. Finally, notions of home are solidified during times of crisis and the online responses to Typhoon Ondoy showcases diasporic nostalgia in action.

Memories of Migration and Settlement

Subjects interviewed for this chapter represent the heterogeneous composition of the Asian American communities of the San Francisco Bay Area. The majority of interviewees were of Filipino or Chinese ancestry representative of the two largest Asian ethnic populations of the Bay Area.[16] Settlement to the Bay Area was not linear for some subjects since they migrated to Southern California before moving northward. In order to showcase the unique circumstances for migrating to the Bay Area, I have separated the experiences of Chinese and Filipino participants for the forces leading to migration are unique for each ethnicity. This section explores the question of identity as it relates to Asian American subjects. First, I will explore interviewees' memories of migration and resettlement followed by the act of "returning home." The following experiences represent individualized accounts under a collective experience of migration to the United States and fall within two categories: memories of migration and settlement and the act returning home.

Filipino Americans

Filipino migratory patterns post-1965 largely reflects the experience of fleeing a country ruled by a dictatorship. Many interviewees noted the Marcos regime and martial law (established in 1972) as the main source for migrating to the United States. However, families were not

necessarily unified in their politics against Ferdinand Marcos. Many interviewees noted divisions within the family unit: those who sided with anti-imperialist efforts and those who supported Ferdinand Marcos. Some shared experiences of family members not being "politically minded at all;" however, once settling in the United States, many apolitical families suddenly became politicized due to unexpected circumstances.[17] One recalled a university colleague's predicament detailing that he was a "left-wing communist" only "a few years removed from throwing Molotov cocktails at Marcos' troops" pursuing a degree alongside "two groups of Marcos cronies."[18] Such frictions and factions within the larger migrant population resulted in anti-Marcos efforts by the newly settled population. One interviewee recalled her father's political endeavors by stating, "He didn't really have a job [in the United States] but he was very politically active in the Philippines during the Marcos regime" and recalled him routinely travelling back and forth as a close confident of Ninoy Aquino.[19] Although her father immersed himself in seemingly leftist activities abroad, he identifies as a conservative in the United States straying from Filipino American politics altogether. Thus, for interviewees, political differences between conservative and liberal family members became divisive and perplexing especially for elders who by in large stray away from domestic Filipino American politics.

The presence of the United States military bases and their hiring of Filipinos also influenced Filipino migration patterns to the United States. Filipinos hired by the U.S. military as stewards and chefs had the opportunity to petition for visas to migrate to the United States and such linkages highlight the bulk of post-1965 migratory patterns of interviewees. For many interviewees, migration to the United States was aided by their fathers' military service and many respondents recall their fathers' possessing dual citizenship. Furthermore, the legacy of the Philippine American War (1899-1902) resulted in a high number of Filipinas (Filipino

women) marrying American servicemen and having mixed (*mestizo/a*) offspring that held dual citizenship status.

Dual citizenship led some interviewees to prepare for the transition to United States by practicing American holidays. For example, one participant recalled celebrating Thanksgiving as baffling:

> Since my family was Americanized, we celebrated Thanksgiving. We had a turkey and everything. And I kind of wondered, 'What the hell? Nobody in the Philippines celebrates Thanksgiving! What the hell are [we] celebrating that for?' [We] just did it because [my relatives] were American. My great grandfather and grandfather were Americans.[20]

Thus, the economic opportunities championed by the U.S. migratory experience resultantly affects the identity of those possessing dual citizenship marking such Filipinos as a privileged class temporarily tied to the Philippines.

Many recall their parent's transmitting Filipino culture through materials items. Parents migrating to the U.S. often brought cultural mementos such as *banings* (woven floor mats), Filipino swords displays, wooden spoon and fork wall ornaments as cultural signifiers or reminders of their homeland. In addition, yearbooks, photographs, trunks and furniture found their way into many homes.

The transmission of culture did not, however, extend much beyond the material as participants' parents discouraged language acquisition. Many participants noted that their parents discouraged them from speaking *Tagalog*, the most spoken Filipino dialect, as an attempt to try to keep their children "as American as possible."[21] One participant recalls his parent's decision:

> The only thing they transferred was the Philippines. They did not want to teach us the language. We made fun of them for having accents and all of that. They did not want to make it an issue. I do not even carry my mom's maiden name. It was my father's way of saying, 'We are American.'[22]

Many participants recall understanding "a little bit" of a Filipino dialect but not fully comprehending the language as a result of parents' desires to keep their offspring "as American as possible."[23] Efforts to stifle children from learning a Filipino dialect were reinforced by migrants' English fluency.[24] The suppression of the maintenance of Filipino language(s) while embracing English can be seen as an act of becoming American as possible which, in turn, equates an emulation of whiteness. Zhou (2009) reveals that many Asian Americans believe "white is synonymous with American."[25]

Distancing oneself from one's ascribed ethnic or racial category speaks to the imposed otherness many Filipinos in America face sometimes leading to misidentification due to visibility depending on the place of settlement. One participant who migrated to the Midwest before California recalled being misidentified as other Asian ethnicities. "People thought we were Vietnamese. They didn't know what to call us besides "gooks," "japs," and, "chinks," he recalls.[26] "They could not figure out what we were. Sometimes when I had longer hair, they would think I was Native American," he recounts.[27] Thus, racial and ethnic misidentification pervaded their daily lives influencing his father to associate with non-whites until relocating to ethnically diverse San Francisco.

Interviewees noted that race and ethnicity were not the only obstacles they faced when settling in the United States; class was also a factor. Many noted the hardships adjusting to their

new environment were characterized by downward mobility. One participant shared his recollections of leaving the Philippines and trying to maintain previous class status while resettling in North Hollywood:

> We sort of restaged the compound I grew up in. Definitely the living conditions were far worse because we did not have the quality of life because my mother had to leave in quite a hurry and we did not have a lot of cash. It was drastic. The circumstances of our departure, of our exile that we came up here with little to nothing back to being working class, or in the United States, working poor – and then we got back on our feet again – but certainly never to the standards I was born into.[28]

The above experience echoed true for many interviewees adjusting to their class status. Many participants noted the shift from a comfortable middle-class lifestyle in the Philippines to suddenly living in low-income apartments. One participant shared his experience growing up in a low-income multiracial apartment complex:

> I live in the same apartment complex I grew up in. It is so different now compared to what it used to be. It is nice and quiet now. Back then it was low-income housing. [During] that time you had so many kids running around – different races, Filipinos, Afghans, the white kids. It was a big mess in the backyard.[29]

Raising children in low-income environments not only exposed youth to the multiracial composition of their neighborhoods but also the public school system. Many parents turned to Catholic private schools for their children's education in order to maintain their Catholic traditions brought over from the Philippines and to avoid problems of large urban schools.

Filipinos interviewed for this study are highly educated and most obtained bachelors degrees with many going on for masters, and/or doctoral degrees in the humanities. Many cited their experiences at San Francisco State University as pivotal not only in instilling a sense of ethnic pride and agency but also in influencing many of them to work for and/or establishing community based organizations of the Bay Area such as Filipinos for Affirmative Action, Asian Health Services, and Filipino Civil Rights Advocates. Some opened their own businesses serving Filipino American and Asian American clientele such as nightclubs (the Poleng Lounge) and restaurants (No Worries and Mercury Lounge). Such efforts not only speak to the resiliency of Filipino Americans of the Bay Area, but also the ability and privilege to establish Filipino American specific businesses and organizations to address the population's needs.

Chinese Americans

Chinese American migratory experiences differ significantly from that of Filipino Americans. For the most part, Chinese interviewed migrated to the U.S. for economic and education opportunities rather than fleeing a dictatorship. Participants interviewed noted that their parents migrated from Guangzhou (Canton) Province to the Bay Area due to its high concentration of Chinese Americans and social services.

Chinese immigrants to the Bay Area faced challenges rooted class, race, and language. Settlement did not represent downward mobility for the majority of Chinese participants, but rather reinforced their working-class status. However, settling in the U.S. presented racial challenges since many grew up in multiracial low-income neighborhoods such as East Oakland and San Francisco's Visitacion Valley. In addition, immigrants faced challenges in area of language. One participant recalled her father being fired from his job at a gas station after one

day for not understanding English. In order to navigate the language barrier many Chinese participants recalled their parents working as janitors or bus boys, an experience shared by many Latina/o migrants.

Obstacles presented by the language barrier led many Chinese to seek out services in one of the many Chinatown's of the Bay Area.[30] Oakland's Chinatown houses many support services to address the needs of low-income Chinese. For example, Wah Sung Service Club at Lincoln Recreational Center distributes free lunch to economically disadvantaged Chinatown residents. San Francisco participants recall parents utilizing social services such as food stamps, ESL, and assistance with social services paperwork. However, traditional social services were not the only avenues accessed for support as many relied on family friends for babysitting which characterizes the tight knit and resilient community. One participant recalled her parents dropping her off at an "Old Chinese lady's house" early in the morning and would pick her up at ten in the evening while they were juggling three janitorial positions.[31]

Many interviewees shared experiences that reflect the general upwardly mobile characteristics found among Chinese migrant populations. One participant recounted his father migrating from Canton Province to the United States only to live in a low-income apartment in New York for many years while pursuing multiple degrees. After earning a M.D., his father relocated to the Bay Area where he practiced his profession as a neurologist and bought a home in Piedmont, an "upper middle class suburban city embedded inside of Oakland."[32] He continues that Piedmont, "one of the highest tax brackets" in California, carries the air of an "illusion of safety" and "privilege" leading Piedmont High School administrators to turn a blind eye to the marijuana and alcohol consumption on campus.[33] He recalls being able to "count the number of African Americans at Piedmont High on one or two hands" and an unhealthy

competition between white and Asian students.[34] Many students fell into the rut of "acting hard" or "gangsta" manifested in "Azn pride" (Asian Pride); however such affinities were superficial because students "were not attuned to race."[35] The majority of Piedmont High School students went onto four years institutions entering the CSU or UC systems, because of Piedmont High's "higher footing" as opposed to the Oakland Unified School District.[36]

Chinese who are raised in affluent suburban environments were not totally removed from the ethnic ghetto of Chinatown. Chinese Americans not only shop and eat in Chinatown but also volunteer at many of the social service providers. As a result, many suburban Chinese hold a certain amount of affinity for Chinatown. One participant recounted his family's history of volunteerism in Chinatown influencing his decision to volunteer at Asian Health Services: "I tell people I lived in Piedmont, but I grew up in Chinatown."[37] Thus, suburban Chinese have the ability to work in Chinatown, but not live in Chinatown. This strikingly leads suburban Chinese and urban Chinese to take on surprisingly different paths: one to uplift and volunteer for the sake of Chinatown's low-income population and another to escape the economic confines of Chinatown.

Those that seek to leave the confines of Chinatown oftentimes do so through education only to come back to Chinatown to uplift its residents through community oriented professional careers. Chinese interviewed for this study all went on to obtain bachelor's and/or masters degrees at state and private universities in and out of California and are intrinsically tied to Chinatown through their ties to social service agencies (through access and volunteerism) or by frequenting many of the establishments for food while working or accessing the aforementioned groups. On a number of occasions, I have met Chinese interviewed for this study at establishments in Oakland's Chinatowns for a bowl of *phở* (Vietnamese noodle soup).

Discussing memories of migration in combination with political strategies to uplift the various Asian American communities simultaneously straddled domestic and international spheres through the consumption of food from the Asian diaspora. In this case, eating *phở* became a practice of Chinese migrants consuming food of their neighbors, the newly arrived Vietnamese refugee population, but also a cultural marker and practice of East Bay activists to discuss issues pertinent to Asian American communities.

Returning "Back Home"

The process of returning home for many Asian Americans is intrinsically tied to identity politics. Many students of Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies cultivate a sense of identity influenced by legislative acts and historical racialization and as a result become culturally-activated.[38] Thus, Asian American Studies serves as a conduit for many students to serve their respective communities. The exposure to Asian American history often leads many Asian Americans through a period of ethnocentricity; the consumption of popular culture, foods, and political figures (i.e., Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Gandhi, and Jose Rizal) and the distancing from their "Americanness" equated with "whiteness."[39] A fertile ground to cultivate identity politics facilitated by this newly found form of cultural nationalism often leads Asian Americans back to their respective countries of origin often romantically referred to as "back home."

Notions of life "back home" are intrinsically tied to feelings of nostalgia for the homeland. Maira (2002) notes nostalgia is "embedded in the yearning for cultural authenticity" and is highlighted by contradictions.[40] Vergara (2009) argues the "nostalgic impulse is an act of self-delusion, where the faraway past (or the past) is reconfigured as closer to the ideal."[41]

Indeed, many of the interviewees' experiences, which follow, highlight the contradictions raised by returning to the home country.

Language and its maintenance posited challenging for interviewees upon return resulting in culture shock. One recalls returning to the Philippines after thirty-two years being "very strange:"

> The strangest part for me was that everything was different. I had grown up there for the early part of my childhood and what was strange was that nothing was familiar, even the language. I speak *Tagalog*, but it was just very unfamiliar. I had become so Americanized. You study your culture here but, it is different once you are in it.[42]

Likewise, another participant noted upon returning to Guangzhou (Canton) that she "understood the language" (Cantonese) but "some of the tones and slang [were] different."[43] She recalls being called a *gwaimoi* or "white girl" because she is from the United States and relatives questioning her physical stature and dress:

> I am not skinny or flat chested. To them I am dressed too provocative when I am wearing a tank top. [Their reaction] was 'you don't wear tank tops or shorts.' They expect you to wear that uniform: dress pants and shirt. 'It is hella' (very) hot![44]

Her experience of not fitting the physical expectations of what a Chinese woman should be combined with acclimating to her homeland led her relatives to question her "Chineseness."[45] The process of identification is two-fold and contradictory: she is labeled "Chinese" in the United States and not "Chinese" in China. Thus, for many Asian Americans, the process of

returning home re-instates their "Americanness" an identifier many Chinese Americans resist in the States.

For some Filipino Americans the return to the Philippines revealed the stark contrast between the U.S. and the home country. One noted her experiences as revelatory:

> I was just so used to how life was here [in the U.S.]. It made me realize that I took a lot of things for granted. Just seeing the poverty on the streets makes you realize why people want to bail. No opportunities and no kind of social structure to move out of unless you are corrupt and know the right people.[46]

Sights of poverty and corruption upon returning to the homeland ultimately challenged romanticized visions of home. One interviewee came to the realization that "the dollar is king" in which "you can buy your way through anything."[47] He recalled his family going through customs with relative ease by bribing customs agents and witnessing such corruption made him realize the difference between the Filipinos in the Philippines and the United States:

> Being Filipino American is an understanding completely different from the Philippines and coming over here. It is two different worlds. It is two different cultures. The only thing[s] that [are] holding you to the Philippines [are] the color of your skin or that your parents were there and [those are] the only thing[s] that [are] different.[48]

These differences resonated with him later while at San Francisco State University when he took part in the Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) as opposed to the League of Filipino Students (LFS) a group which attracted politically minded Filipino Americans and pushed them towards the anti-imperialist fight in the Philippines. He found such motives dubious:

> My argument was that none of these people have been to the Philippines. They can talk about all they want about what is going on in the Philippines, but our budgets are still going to get cut and they are not doing anything about it. I think of all that energy they were using was wasted on something that is outside our borders.[49]

His opinion echoes the often times contradictory political pursuits of Filipinos in the United States – that of uplifting the Filipino American population or that of the population "back home."

Witnessing the plight of Philippines first hand, however, did not question notions of home for all Filipino participants. Upon returning in the early 1990s, one participant found solace in his relatives. He recalls his *lola* (Grandmother) reassuring him that he "should always know that you have a home here."[50] Upon reflection, he remembers his friends telling him that by the "fourth week, you are going to have a hard time leaving" – a decision that he found to be correct:

> It became difficult. I was in organizations at school. I delayed going back. I stayed in Bagio when the typhoon hit. It was so fucking cold too! It made me think of school. Then when I was back in San Francisco, I wanted to be there [the Philippines].[51]

He also experienced culture shock rooted in ethnic misidentification similar to his experience in the United States: "I went through such culture shock coming back. Filipinos did not think of me being from the United States. They thought I was something else – "he must be Chinese, Japanese, or Malaysian."[52] Thus, the act of returning home represents an identity crisis mediated through notions of dual presence: acknowledging one's ancestral history and ethnicity becomes an ever present question of acceptance.

The aforementioned experiences have often been described as being indicative of the transnational experience which evokes notions of having multiple "homes," non-linear migratory patterns, flexible citizenship, and/or being displaced.[53] Many of those interviewed returned to the homeland to visit, however, the majority of them lack the transnational linkages (i.e., visas, work permits, capital, and housing arrangements) required to stay in their homeland for extended periods of time. Thus participants interviewed for this study are not necessarily "transmigrants" but rather Asian Americans who possess the ability to travel to the home country.

Referencing the Homeland: Filipino American Hip-Hop Cultural Productions

Asian American artists straddle a precariously thin line between the domestic and the diasporic. Machida (2009) writes, "reflecting the varied transnational and diasporic positions, the discontinuities between the domestic and diasporic can be quite pronounced."[54] For example, Asians migrants often look upon Asian Americans as being overly political. Furthermore, Asian American artists feel the pressure to be "cultural ambassadors" for the larger Asian American communities invoking notions of artistic responsibility rooted in representational identity politics.[55] In addition, Asian American artists produce and perform culture as a calculated act of self-consciousness and this pressure becomes intensified by Asian American hip-hop artists' responsibility to "represent" one's people and homeland.[56] By focusing on two artists from the underground – Nump and Native Guns – I hope to examine the strategic decisions tied to national identity and how notions of home are addressed by Filipino American hip-hop artists.

Many hip-hop groups featuring Asian Americans have emerged from the Bay Area and Filipino American hip-hop artists represent the largest community.[57] De Leon (2004) notes that Filipino Americans have moved on from DJ-ing, breakdancing, and graffiti into the world of

emceeing.[58] Emceeing, in turn, requires a more pronounced expression that the other aspects of hip-hop culture, and thus, puts artists in situations in which they are racial misidentified.[59] Bay Area hip-hop culture replicates predominate fixations of space and place through claiming one's territory through telephone area codes [i.e., 707 (Vallejo) 415 (San Francisco) and 510 (the East Bay)] – and affiliations to one's crew based upon race and/or alliances often referred to as "my peoples," "cousins," "folks," among other coded words rooted in familial relationships: such markers transform when national symbols are added to the equation.[60] For example, Vallejo Filipino American hyphy artist Nump's mixtape entitled *The Gorillapino Comp* (2009) features the artist wearing an oversized black shirt emblazoned with the sun of the Philippines. Below the artist's image are two highly politicized flags of the *Katipunan* alongside the current national flag of the Philippines. The *Katipunan* was the revolutionary anti-Spanish independence group during the late 19th century Philippines (1892-1897). The majority of hyphy fans are most likely unaware of the *Katipunan* but they are accustomed to Filipino Americans since many hip-hop artists such as Mistah F.A.B. and KMEL's Rick Lee have given "shout outs" to the Filipino American fan-base.[61] Thus, Nump's utilization of flags can be read not only as an act of pride but as an act of resistance against non-Filipinos wearing Filipino garments.[62]

Nump's marketing, a combination of appearances, videos, and mixtapes distributed by the online media outlets reveals a continued emphasis on his Filipino heritage. In the music video for *Jump On Da Scrape* (2008) Nump rides the hood of an automobile wearing an oversized white t-shirt with the Philippine flag.[63] World-renowned turntablist, DJ Qbert, also Filipino American, appears in the video solidifying Nump's credibility by receiving support from one of the Bay Area's pioneering hip-hop artists. Additionally, Bay Area hip-hop star E-40

figures prominently in the video since Nump's releases are distributed by the Vallejo rapper's Sick Wid It Records label. Furthermore, the multiracial composition of the video in combination with its albeit sexist inclusion of women is indicative of the pressure to represent the Bay Area in an inclusive fashion. Such charged imagery rooted in racial, ethnic and gender politics speak to the pressures to represent not only the "home," "area code," or "city" but also its vibrant culture. Nump's efforts to address his Filipino fan-base speak to the pressures Asian American artists face as "cultural ambassadors;" however, Nump does not address topics stemming from the homeland but rather addresses a uniquely Filipino American predicament heightened and scrutinized by hip-hop culture. The predicament is clear: hip-hop culture is based upon skill and success is measured in sales. Therefore, Nump rapping about issues about Filipino Americans and the Philippines would limit and demarcate his fan-base hence the subtitle of *The Gorillapino Comp*, *Muzik 4 Damasses* (music for the masses).

Native Guns, a defunct Filipino American hip-hop group comprised of Kiwi and Bambu, epitomizes Asian American hip-hop through lyrical content.[64] Their lyrics focus on issues such as global capitalism, occupation, racism, sexism, oppression, and resistance that resonate with culturally-activated Asian American audiences. The song and the accompanying music video for *Drowning* (2007), for example, examine the politics of representation through the lives of a Pinay (woman) and a Pinoy (man). Emphasizing the experiences faced by Filipino Americans looking for role models in the mainstream media, the song follows the two different live paths which ultimately manifest in devastating results: the Pinay commits suicide after an overdose brought on by self-hate while the Pinoy succumbs to the grip of the industrial prison complex as a result of emulating the "gangsta" lifestyle. Alternatively, Native Guns addresses global and local issues by critiquing global capitalism in their song "Work It" (2006). In sum, the song

addresses the conundrum faced by radical leftist hip-hop artists: posturing anti-globalization rhetoric while wearing hip-hop "gear" (clothes, jewelry, and cellular phones) manufactured in the Third World. The lyrics address cheap labor markets in the Philippines, Africa, and the United States through the consumption of hip-hop gear: a "Raiders cap," "Gap slacks," "Louis Vuitton," "Nike," "Shiniest stones (jewels from Sierra Leone)," "coffee, artichokes, and broccoli" and "cellular phones" – all of which are produced by exploitive labor practices. A song of self-critique in an undeniably Marxist fashion, "Work It" not only admonishes the forces of global capitalism through the experiential but also encourages the exploited not to give up and make "that money, honey." In sum, song addresses the adage "think globally, act locally" within a culturally-activated context.

Native Guns marketing tactics represents politically-conscious Asian American hip-hop at its peak. Relying on metropolitan and college towns with large and culturally-active Asian American student bodies, the group successfully toured the United States promoting themselves through social network media outlets like MySpace and Facebook. For example, the group's appearance at University of Michigan in 2006 drew approximately two hundred fans by word of mouth and tour dates shared on the Internet. The crowd, while not exclusively Asian American, raised their fists, in a display of unity and resistance during Bambu and Kiwi's utilization of the hip-hop practice of call and response through the cries of "put your fists up!" and "who's in the house?"

The success of Filipino American hip-hop artists of the Bay Area hinges upon mass appeal. The politically conscious lyrics of Native Guns appeal to an educated college minded audience as indicative of their mainly Asian American, and particularly, Filipino American audience. Nump, on the other hand, exhibits a mass appeal through the Hyphy Movement

through the display of Bay Area pride widening his potential for sales in the mainstream local market. Nump achieves mainstream radio play since the local commercial hip-hop station KMEL supports its homebred artists which emphasize the "safe" Bay Area niche while the reach of Native Guns and subsequent solo careers are limited to left-leaning college, pirate, and/or "free" radio stations (KALX, KPOO, KPFA, and East Oakland Radio).[65]

Both Nump and Native Guns wield a calculated identity politic rooted in the Filipino/American experience. Nump's fashion is intrinsically tied to the Philippines and represents a pride less dependent on lyrical content. On the other hand, Native Guns' lyrical emphasis on the Filipino and Filipino American experience grants the group a certain amount of credibility reliant less on fashion and more on politics that is reinforced by their sole album's title – *Barrel Men* (2006). The title of Native Guns album can be read two ways: as an act of ethnic pride emphasizing a particular masculine Filipino American endeavor or as a gun. The barrel man, a carved Filipino souvenir made for tourists, is a wooden male figurine covered by a barrel. When the barrel is raised an enormous phallus is revealed surprising the viewer. Alternatively, the barrel can also be read as a barrel of a gun.

The Internet is integral to the success of both Nump and Native Guns by serving as a tool to distribute releases and announcing appearances. For aspiring hip-hop artists of Asian Pacific Islander descent, both artists represent success through circumventing traditional music marketing techniques free of the mainstream music industry. As a result, the subsequent generations with the technological "know-how" and access are afforded the ability to release and share their productions for little capital. In addition, video producers, in the case of Native Guns, represent the practice tapping into existing linkages between artists within the larger Californian Asian American network.[66] And as the next section will show, the Internet increasingly figures

into the lives of Asian Americans presenting challenges to previous erected identities tied to the homeland.

The Homeland in Crisis: The Philippines, Filipino Americans, and the Facebook Generation

Lisa Nakamura's seminal essay on cyberspace (2000) claims the Internet in its infancy championed the erasure of categories as epitomized by Microsoft's commercial featuring a variety of people erasing the said categories of race, class, and gender.[67] The following years proved otherwise; the proliferation of groups based on sexual preference, race, ethnicity and gender throughout chat rooms, bulletin boards, websites to contemporary blogs and journals dispelled this assimilationist vision. Marginalized communities lacking venues to mediate their voices suddenly experienced having voices freed from the traditional outlets of the press and television. For Asian Americans, the Internet not only enables communication across great distances, but also serves as a battleground to assert an Asian American identity through acts of online resistance through responses to anti-Asian stereotypes perpetuated by the mainstream media.[68]

The hyper-interconnectedness of contemporary day-to-day status updates via Facebook and Twitter combined with wireless technologies, email, and webcams instantaneously connects communities in ways once unimaginable particularly during times of crisis. For example, on September 26, 2009 Typhoon Ondoy swept through the Philippines causing massive flooding and destruction. News of its destructive power immediately flooded the social networking site Facebook. Links documenting the tragedy were shared and posted to many a user profile which inspired mobilization efforts between Filipinos abroad that directed relief efforts "back home."

For example, Ray Salonga's Facebook profile status updated from Piedmont, California on September 27, 2009 signifies his dual presence: "Yikes! They are evacuating my hometown!"[69] What transpired over the next few days represents mobilization across borders at its finest. Ray's brother created a PayPal account linked to relief efforts and within the first few hours donations flooded in. Ray's status on September 28, 2009 reads,

> Folks, please read my note – my brother has set up an email account just for PayPal donations and has raised over $1000 in about 5 hours from Facebook friends alone! He and his spouse have been...running off to the supermarket and buying the canned goods themselves – and dropping them off personally at the relief center in Ateneo. Please help![70]

Ray's plea immediately followed by an image of goods purchased for distribution posted to his profile as proof under the status update which reads, "here they are in action!"[71] Soon after Ray's efforts a number of Filipino American community organizations followed suit among them, Bayan USA, and the local Bay Area hip-hop program Distortion-2-Static's *Legendary Fundraiser for the P.I.* (October 1) followed by a fundraiser at Poleng Lounge. The Bay Area's efforts arguably influenced subsequent events held in Los Angeles including *We Are One* (October 22) and *Ondoy Project* (October 28). The rapid succession of events following the Typhoon highlights the resourcefulness on part of Filipino American communities of California, the largest Asian American population in California. The initial efforts mobilized by individuals donating to PayPal accounts rather than the Red Cross and other relief agencies suggests that participants valued a direct connection to the survivors through an ad-hoc relief effort on the part of interested individuals.

Subsequent relief efforts to the earthquakes which devastated Haiti (2010) and northern Japan (2011) offers a compelling contrast on behalf of its migrants living aboard. Both countries have a relatively small number of nationals living in the U.S. and this in turn impacted their abilities to respond collectively to the crisis. Instead, the response to each crisis relied upon charitable events spearheaded by musicians. Such events continue a long tradition of musicians mobilizing to bring about change.[72]

The response on part of Asian American communities to the crisis in Japan, however, paled in comparison to relief efforts directed towards the Philippines. Facebook users created avatars symbolizing their sympathy for earthquake victims and a collective response on behalf of Asian Americans did not take place until much later. *Japan Restart Charity Concert* (April 16) was held over two days in San Francisco – one month after the earthquake. The multiethnic event featured a variety of Japanese American artists – the ScoJourners, jazz musician Mark Izu and performance artist Brenda Wong Aoki – in addition to a number of cultural performances by Korean, Latino, and Vietnamese collectives. This was followed by the Oakland Asian Cultural Center's *We Are One Island* (April 23) featuring a number of Japanese American musicians such as emcee Colin "Senbei" Ehara, Michael Sasaki of the jazz group Hiroshima, and a number of Japanese Taiko and dance performances. *Sweet Relief* (April 23) took place in Hollywood followed by *Play For Japan USA* (April 29) in Woodside, California. In sum, the ethnic and racial composition of the events straddled two differing camps: multicultural collaboratives and ethnic specific Japanese American alliances.

Mobilization efforts on part of the Filipino American communities and concerned parties signals the need for further investigation on the impact of the Internet on identity and community. With a click of a mouse, users immediately share concerns and via capital can

establish accounts directly tied to relief efforts – a phenomenon with striking implications on users' domestic and global identities. As mobilization efforts continually rely on social networking sites proves beneficial the challenge to incorporate such realities as a form of local and global capital become realized through the notions of "here" and "there."

Conclusion

> It ain't where you from,
>
> It's where you're at. – Rakim

The oft-repeated line from Eric B and Rakim's "I Ain't No Joke" (1987) contends that representing one's place is futile unless one is grounded. Rooted primarily in the African American experience, such a call was used to distinguish one-self from acts of aggrandizement within the hip-hop community. However, for people of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry, it is precisely where people under the multi-ethnic umbrella term of Asian American *are from*, whether it is the homeland or the States that determines their ethnic identities, at least for the moment.

Asian Americans interviewed for this chapter possess a deep understanding of their migratory experiences and possess a desire to reference the homeland through acts of consumption. Those interviewed are forever tied to the mythical homeland and their experiences exude a certain sense of marginality – not Chinese or Filipino enough in the home country, and not American (i.e., white) enough in the States.

Popular Filipino American hip-hop artists break free of the constraints of marginality by carving out their own spaces within the larger Bay Area hip-hop community through underground channels facilitated by social networking sites. References to the homeland are

achieved through dress, lyrical content, and/or imagery tied to album releases and videos. Since such endeavors are free from major label pressures, the artists are granted a level of freedom to present themselves in the manner that they please – in this case-wielding a certain amount of national and ethnic pride stemming from the Filipino and Filipino American experience.

Technology presented challenges for Asian American populations invested in the welfare of their respective homelands. The collective response by Asian American populations to the devastation caused by Typhoon Ondoy in the Philippines speaks to the utility of a pan-Asian politic to address needs stemming from the home country free from inter-ethnic squabbles of representation under the political banner of "Asian American." Most importantly, such a response represents a bridging of the international and domestic spheres influencing our notions of "Asian American" beyond the U.S. experience.

Chapter Two: Caught In-between: Asian Americans, Hip-Hop, and the Model Minority

> Now, red, white, black, tan, yellow, or brown,
> It really doesn't matter, we can all get down,
> And doowhatwelike, yeah, and doowhatwelike. – Digital Underground
>
> All my Negroes, Latinos, Filipinos. – Mistah F.A.B.
>
> Better rip through 'em from the tip of my Mao Tse-Tung. – The Coup
>
> So don't follow me, up and down your market,
> Or your little chop suey ass will be a target. – Ice Cube

The aforementioned lyrics of widely recognized hip-hop songs originate from California, three from the Bay Area, one from Los Angeles, and capture the Asian Pacific Islander subject within rap music spanning over twenty years. From the idealistic funk of Digital Underground's "Doowutchyalike" (1990) to the contemporary hyphy sounds of Mistah F.A.B.'s "Super Sic Wid It" (2005), black hip-hop artists of Oakland, California reflect the multiracial composition of the Bay Area through positive party time lyrics. Such optimism, however, overlooks the realities of racial hierarchies and resultant disparities faced among non-whites communities vying for space and services stemming from neglect manifested through deindustrialization, urban renewal, and trickle down Reaganomics.[73] Ice Cube's "Black Korea" (1991) encapsulates contestations between Asians and blacks during the Reagan Bush era by pitting yellow versus black arguably adding fuel to the fires of the Los Angeles Uprising (1992).[74] Indeed, Rodney King's cry of "can we all get along?" seemed to temporarily serve as a fire retardant to civil unrest; however,

the vision of Korean shop owners armed with automatic rifles atop of their businesses permanently etched itself in the public's mind.[75] Two years preceding Ice Cube's incendiary song, Oakland's the Coup released "Dig It" (1993), an unapologetically Marxist track culling inspiration from Che Guevara, H. Rap Brown, the Mau Mau, and last but not least, Mao Zedong. The Coup, led by afro-ed Boots Riley, encapsulates a truly Bay Area political hybrid stemming from the birthplace of ethnic studies, the Black Panther Party, the Red Guards, and the Brown Berets. It is no surprise that Boots references Mao given the influence of the Little Red Book on counter-hegemonic struggles of the 1960s onward. The influential Maoist quote "power comes from the barrel of a gun" manifested in public displays of power by armed Black Panthers speaks to cross cultural influences between blacks and Asians. Indeed, one of largely forgotten and recently deceased Black Panther, Richard Aoki (1938 - 2009), was not black, but Japanese American.

Aoki's invisibility within a largely black political organization speaks to the larger issue of visibility of Asians Pacific Islanders within hip-hop culture. The aforementioned songs place the Asian subject within the lens of blackness through the vocalized lyrics of black men. In turn, the Asian subject in hip-hop becomes a signifier for multicultural inclusion, animosity, collaboration, and/or influence. However, Asian subjects appear most often as backdrops, not agents, of hip-hop culture.[76]

Flashback to 1993, San Francisco, California, Digable Planets takes a break from their opening number to address the audience. I am in attendance with my black girlfriend, and bemused by the overwhelmingly white audience that it inspired a game between us: count your people. I counted the Asians, she, the blacks. In the end I won, but such a win was bittersweet since Butterfly addressed the crowd racially as blacks, whites, and *Orientals*. I booed Butterfly's

use of this Eurocentric term as the images of the Japanese jazz band accompanying Digable Planets' music video *Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)* (1992) faded into obscurity.

Such an occurrence became commonplace during my relationship with my black girlfriend due to the civil unrests of the period. I had been chastised two years beforehand for wearing Bob Marley's *Uprising* t-shirt by a Filipino American JROTC platoon leader accusing me of trying to be black. My soon to be girlfriend came to my aid only to be punished with pushups as a rifle lay over her knuckles. On the night of the Rodney King verdict punctuated by a precautionary Oakland curfew, we rode the bus home from Berkeley together as a black male looked in our direction and muttered, "sleeping with the enemy." Confused, I did not respond, not knowing whether the man was referring to the album by Black Panther rapper Paris (1992) or if he knew that Paris had given accolades to the Bay Area Korean American hip-hop group Fists of Fury.

Confusions regarding musical affiliations harkened back to the days of my youth in Alameda, California roller-skating with my sister to tunes by Con Funk Shun, the Gap Band, and Earth Wind and Fire. My parents regulated such funky offerings to the television screen best represented by *Soul Train*, *Solid Gold*, *Dance Fever*, and the more adult-oriented music videos of Black Entertainment Television. At an early age, I had an affinity for funk, but to display such a liking vocally in the early 1980s was unheard of for funk equated blackness and the dangerous city next door – Oakland. Despite my taste for funk, I was wary of wearing such a racialized badge in public. I succinctly recall my auntie's black boyfriend jovially asking whether or not I liked soul music on the steps of my home. I stood speechless. Such a term confused me, as did subsequent racial tests applied to music.

This chapter examines the Asian American subject within the larger hip-hop canon through ethnographic research. Most scholarship regarding Asian Americans and hip-hop has focused on artists, authenticity, Orientalist tropes or transnational fusions.[77] I respond to Oliver Wang's "Rapping and Repping Asian: Race Authenticity, and the Asian American MC" (2007) in which he argued for the need of ethnographic fieldwork on Asian American hip-hop audiences and contemporary ethnographic scholarship.[78] In this section, I am interested in investigating why Asian Americans gravitate towards hip-hop – a question that is subject to much debate in Asian American circles. Through ethnographic research conducted during a period of civil unrest stemming from the killing of Oscar Grant, this chapter aims to address contemporary frictions and collaborations between African Americans and Asian Americans in the Bay Area. I hope to investigate the relationships between Asian Americans and African Americans through an interrogation of the utility of blackness, the model minority myth, and its impact on Asian American identity within hip-hop culture.

Conversion and Diversion: Afro-Asian Connections and Disconnections

Contemporary Afro-Asian scholarship highlights collaborative steps across the color line through political engagement and cultural production and such work represents a conversion of these two diasporas. A number of theoretical approaches rooted in historical analysis examine the border crossings between African and Asian peoples and such scholarship constructs an Afro-Asian historiography of cross-cultural collaboration focusing primarily on political engagement.[79] Steps across racial boundaries are not limited to racial politics, but also popular culture.[80]

Contemporary relationships between African and Asian Americans, however, have been problematic and these ruptures represent a diversion between the diasporas. Asian Americans

are most often than not portrayed as beneficiaries of the Civil Rights Movement or more appropriately, the Black Freedom Struggle. In addition, black critics such as Tate (2003) and Kitwana (2005) contend that hip-hop is a uniquely African American creation and thereby demarcate what is authentically black and what is not.[81] As a result, Asian American involvement within hip-hop circles is largely questioned and/or met with suspicion.

Race relations between African and Asian Americans in the Bay Area have been tenuous at best.[82] In 2010, a number of crimes and homicides perpetrated by African American males against Asian victims have filled newspaper headlines.[83] Perceived as easy targets, Asian Americans are caught in-between and often refuse to press charges due to language barriers, retaliation, and/or fear of the authorities. An interviewee recalls an incident with African American youth that occurred in the early 1990s:

> We had a 1979 two-door Plymouth – really beat up and old. We were stopped at a stoplight and these African American kids were walking across the street and they saw us. They bounced their basketball on our windshield, shattered it, laughed, and walked off. [84]

Such interracial conflict stems from previous anti-Asian sentiment during the Los Angeles Uprisings fueling tensions in Oakland throughout the early 1990s. Korean, Chinese, and Cambodian ownership of liquor stores, donut shops, and restaurants in low-income communities caused resentment on behalf of some African Americans trying to establish black-owned businesses in economically depressed Oakland – resentment not limited to Oakland but also San Francisco.

Instances of violence between African and Asian Americans punctuate the experiences of interviewees coming of age in the economically depressed areas of the San Francisco Bay Area.

One recalls being beat up by a gang of African Americans while riding the bus through Bayview Hunters Point:

> I was robbed, assaulted, and knocked out while taking the Third Street bus home. The perpetrators were African Americans. There were eight of them – five guys and three girls. I was sitting in the back of the bus and they spit on me. And then I grabbed one, and they all mobbed on me.[85]

Growing up in the low-income neighborhood of San Francisco's Visitacion Valley proved to be an additionally trying period:

> It was not a good area to hang around. When we came home, we were always scared. We were always watching our backs coming home. It was not a happy place as crime usually goes unreported. Robberies still occur. There was a purse snatching in front of my house two months ago. During Chinese New Year, some African Americans target people with red envelopes.[86]

Such a negative experience led him to seek protection in San Francisco Chinatown since "We were not going to be assaulted in Chinatown. We were not racialized."[87] However, for others, Chinatown presents an illusion of safety.[88] He recounts an altercation in Chinatown at the Lincoln Recreational Center:

> There was a fight that happened between an African and Vietnamese American male on the basketball court. A hard foul became pushing and shoving. I do not know at what point it escalated but the Vietnamese male grabbed a machete from his friend and started swinging! The other guy was cut. Fortunately, it was not critical or life threatening. That is the reality of Oakland.[89]

The grim realities of Oakland are indeed real. Upon returning in the winter of 2009, I witnessed an African American male rob an Asian male of his wallet in broad daylight throwing his emptied wallet in the air while fleeing. The incident occurred right before the Lunar New Year and speaks to the targeting of Chinese previously shared. The police responded shortly, due to the fact that the police station is but a few city blocks away; however, such an occurrence speaks to the larger volatile environment of Oakland and more importantly how Asians figure into the equation of black and white racial politics.

The Model Minority: Asian Americans Caught In-between

> There is a widely shared belief that Asian Americans not only have overcome the bondage of racial discrimination, but also have become a successful model minority worthy of emulation by other minorities. Asian Americans are said to be better educated, to be earning as much as any group, to be well assimilated, and to manifest low rates of social deviance.[90]

> Asian Americans are the model minority. Where I live in the Excelsior District of San Francisco, I see a completely different reality. I see working class folks that experience high levels of exploitation from their employers. I see recent immigrants with no access. – Emcee Nomi[91]

The concept of the model minority emerged during the Civil Rights Movement.[92] This concept championed that Asian Americans as the model for other ethnic minorities to follow. This in turn created a wedge of resentment to separate coalition building between non-white ethnic

minorities in particular African Americans. Lee (1996) writes, "the model minority stereotype takes attention off the white majority by pitting Asian Americans against African Americans."[93] Resultantly, Asian Americans became the model for other minorities to follow and according to Tong (1996) the "ideal racial pets of white America."[94] This section will discuss the effects of the model minority myth on Asian Americans and how their engagement of hip-hop culture and blackness poses challenges to the model minority concept.

The model minority myth upholds views of Asian Americans as a problem-free minority and affects services devoted to their communities. The yearly re-application for federal monies devoted to Asian American communities continually addresses notions of the model minority as leverage for funding opportunities. For example, non-profit Asian American organizations routinely address the model minority myth in order to secure funding and such a process speaks to the power such perceptions hold on the entire Asian American population.[95]

Some Asian Americans, however, perpetuate the model minority concept. Media presentations of successful Asian Americans as classical musicians, math wizards, and financial geniuses surely do not dispel this myth.

The pressure placed upon Asian American students to excel academically by their parents combined with the perception of Asian Americans "equat[ing] academic achievement" represents a double bind.[96] Underachieving students are looked upon as having a problem, and resultantly, the model minority concept glosses the problem making it easy to ignore or neglect.[97] Additionally, biology and racism heightens the model minority stereotype. Shankar (2008) writes, "to say that Asian American students are successful merely because they are

racially categorized as Asian suggests a biological underpinning to success."[98] Wu (2006) writes:

> The model minority myth reverses the causes of academic success. By positioning that Asian Americans do well in school because of their Asianness, it defines Asianness as doing well in school. Traits such as doing homework, which are not inherently Asian, are commended as Asian as if race determined behavior. A vicious cycle is set off, in this instance not wholly benign because the expectations imposed on Asian American schoolchildren.[99]

The tremendous pressure to succeed rooted in biological determinism therefore labels all Asian Americans as academic success stories. Since the concept serves its means, there is little need for institutions to question data regarding Asian Americans. Lee (2008) writes, "because aggregate data on Asian Americans supports the stereotype, policymakers assume that Asian Americans are all doing well."[100]

The perception that Asian Americans have achieved economic success in the face of adversity fosters an uneasy relationship between Asians and blacks.[101] One does not have to look further than the Los Angeles Uprisings to witness the wrath Koreatown suffered at the hands of the disenfranchised. Omatsu (2007) writes:

> For inner-city residents, the Asian immigrant becomes the target for their wrath against corporate devastation of their neighborhoods. Moreover, as this symbol merges with other historical stereotypes of Asians, the result is highly charged imagery, which perhaps underlies the ferocity of anti-Asian violence in this period, such as the destruction of Korean small businesses during the Los Angeles uprisings. The Asian immigrant becomes a symbol of wealth-and also greed; a

> symbol of hard work – and also materialism; a symbol of intelligence – and also arrogance; a symbol of self-reliance – and also selfishness and lack of community concern.[102]

As Omatsu duly notes, Korean Americans, and by default, Asian Americans were targeted since they were perceived to be "self serving" community outsiders and symbols of wealth.[103] Complications arise when Asian Americans live in low-income neighborhoods and open businesses that are perceived as taking away economic opportunities and social services from blacks. This tenuous relationship becomes compounded when the multiracial neighborhoods comprised of Asian, African and Latino low-income residents live in close proximity to each other and resentment fosters perceptions of economic inequity.

Asian Americans interviewed for this study challenge the model minority myth by growing up in low-income neighborhoods that are predominately black and Latino. As a method of survival many interviewees adopted black language and/or the gangster lifestyle.[104] A number of interviewees described living in the low-income neighborhoods of San Francisco and Oakland as "hella ghetto" (hell of a ghetto) in the slang of the Bay Area. One interviewee described her East Oakland neighborhood:

> There was not a Safeway to go to. We had to go to the liquor store for milk. We had to walk everywhere. Everyone in our neighborhood did not have the means to get around. Everyone was working two or three jobs. We did not feel safe.[105]

Her description of "hella ghetto" carries connotations of blackness rooted in disenfranchisement but also the multiracial composition of low-income East Oakland. She continues:

> I went to an all black church and an all black preschool. Out a class of thirty, there was me and this other Asian boy. [There was] nothing but Mexicans,

> blacks, or super poor Asians or Southeast Asians – Vietnamese [in our neighborhood]. Our Mexican neighbors would have parties and we would go over there and listen to the music. Me, my mom, and dad would go since my dad worked with a lot of Mexicans.[106]

Her recollections of resettlement speak not only to the multiracial composition of East Oakland but also to the newly arrived refugees from South East Asia namely Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Hmong populations.[107]

The harsh realities of growing up and living in urban environment leads many Asian Americans to appropriate the gangster lifestyle and leads many to succumb to a life of crime. Being wedged in-between often leads many Asian Americans to violent altercations at schools. "Race wars" between African Americans and Asian Americans led one interviewee to take up arms with his Chinese American peers:

> People talk about gang banging. We carried weapons when we went to school. Knifes, mace, butterfly knives, edged teeth knives, ninja stars, belt buckle knives, brass knuckles, one even had a gun. We bought them Chinatown. We listened to [rap] music that glorified the experience. That was the attraction. It represented life. It was not always glamorous. You are poor. You try to make as best as you can so you live or don't get hurt. You always seek respect in some way.[108]

The desire for respect in face of marginality and a perceived passivity ultimately leads many Asian American youth to defend themselves in the face of adversity; such a reality is reflected in popular music. For example, a music video by V-Unit for the song *Got Beef* (2006) features two African American youth harassing a young Asian boy at a basketball court that leads to retaliation. Vietnamese emcee Chuckie Akenz freely uses the word "nigga," hangs with a

Vietnamese gang surrounded by women, import cars, and motorcycles. At the climax of the video, the gang mobs the two African American assailants punctuated by sound of thunderous gunshots.

Many interviewees expressed that they were drawn to hip-hop culture because of the cultural similarities to between blacks and Asians growing up in low-income urban environments. One interviewee argues:

> Look at Oakland! Who are [Asians] growing up with? I did not grow up with no white folks! I grew up with black folks and I am Asian. I culturally relate to [blacks]. I am not black, you are not Asian, but I grew up in the same neighborhood. I go to the liquor store to buy milk and bread. We don't go to Safeway or Trader Joes. We got to go to the corner store. I think that's why we tend to go towards hip-hop.[109]

Being the proverbial product of the environment leads many Asian Americans to find solace in hip-hop songs that reflect the reality of growing up in crime riddled low-income neighborhoods. One interviewee shared his liking for Tupac Shakur's "Life Goes On" (1996):

> 'How many brothers fell from the street?' – The lyrics remind me of the hard knock life. It reflects what is going on in the environment. One of my friends was shot and murdered. But it reminds me that he was part of a gang and he did something that was not healthy. He fell from the streets. [The song] reflects the sadness, the state that my friend was in and many of his family [were] in. It shows the 'nitty grittyness' of life that we as poor immigrants [face] and the situation[s] that we grew up in.[110]

It is no surprise that many Asian American youth gravitate towards hip-hop culture because the songs reflect their experiences. However, for some interviewees their affinity for hip-hop was met with parental protest. One recalls his mother's adverse reaction to hip-hop: "My mom did not like it [because of the use of] foul language. But I loved it. She didn't find it applicable, but I liked it. We would repeat the lyrics, rap along, and get excited."[111] Such an adverse reaction, did not universally apply to all participants. One participant recalled receiving Master P's *MP Da Last Don* (1998) for her thirteenth birthday. Her affinity for gangster rap resonated with her since they reflected her Oakland upbringing. She recalls a proliferation of "homie songs" describing the practice of "pouring out a drink" when "they pass away" resembling the many friendships she had growing up in Oakland.[112] Such songs erroneously described as "glorifying" violence not only provide cautionary tales for listeners but also instill a sense of Bay Area pride. A number of interviewees expressed being fans of a number of hip-hop artists originating from the Bay Area: Too $hort, Richie Rich, E-40, 2Pac, M.C. Hammer, RBL Posse, and Rappin 4-Tay.[113] One recalls being a fan of Rappin 4-Tay's "Playaz Club" (1994) because "it localizes everything: 3rd and Newcomb streets (in Bayview Hunters Point), along with descriptions of San Francisco's Fillmore district and shout outs to Oakland, Richmond, and Vallejo.[114] He acknowledges not being African American, but "still hav[ing] a similar experience growing up in those areas."[115] Another interviewee concurs, that the affinity towards Bay Area homegrown hip-hop artists reflects a sense of Bay Area pride: "It is very nice to say growing up as a kid [that an artist] is from my hometown. Did you know M.C. Hammer is from Oakland? There is this pride you have! That is why [we] gravitate towards hometown people."[116] Thus, for interviewees the gravitation towards hip-hop culture is two fold: on one

hand they are attracted to songs which reflect their urban upbringing while on the other they support their local artists as an act of pride.

Filipino American youth emulating hip-hop culture are caught between differing sets of expectations from community leaders. Growing up in the multiracial environment of the Bay Area, Filipino youth adopt black "swagger" (speech and mannerisms) influenced by hip-hop culture as a means of survival in low-income neighborhoods. However, this is often met with protest from community leaders accusing them of mimicking blackness. Upon further exploration, it was revealed that these older advocates had a problem with Filipino Americans emulating African American culture in particular their adoption of black music and hip-hop culture. One recounted addressing a collegiate Filipino American audience to "turn away from the turntables and repeat after me, 'I am not black and I will never be black.'"[117] Beneath this discussion of mimicry is a thinly veiled distancing from blackness in favor whiteness, and therefore acceptable forms of music. For example, the current singer of the rock band Journey, Arnel Penada, has been lauded as a national treasure of the Philippines since he sings with such a command of Steve Perry's voice.

Given their precarious position as model minorities, Asian Americans adopt African American speech, fashion, and music to legitimize their position as ethnic minorities and as a result are oftentimes accused of mimicry. Due to high degree of invisibility in the mainstream media, Asian Americans often adopt black cultural forms. Poet Thien-bao Thuc Phi writes, "Other than white people African Americans are the most visible race in America, and Asian Americans are the most invisible."[118] The accusation of mimicry holds particular weight against Filipinos and is resultantly perpetuated against celebrities of Filipino descent (i.e., Tia Carrere, Prince, and Vanessa Hudgens) who mask their cultural heritage. One noted that Filipinos are

"everyone and no one" and points to a number of artists who are secretly Filipino but identified by the press as other.[119] Another says, "Filipinos can imitate anything" but it is chiefly dependent on "the job market" and Filipino fluency in English.[120] While another recounts a period of time when Filipino artists were "copycats making money" by imitating popular music trends.[121] However, such accusations were met by protest by some interviewees who've grown tired of being accused of "trying to be black."[122] One DJ noted:

> What is the Asian music you expect my folks to listen to? They do not listen to Yo Yo Ma! What do you expect, J-Pop (Japanese pop music)? My folks listen to US pop music in one form or another and our traditional songs. So what is it that you say that I should listen to that I should be feeling? The music that my people like to dance to [is not constricted] some Filipino artist each time! It is ridiculous to force someone's identity into one construct.[123]

His assertion led him to distance himself from many forms of nationalism he finds among Filipino Americans. He believes such restrictive practices discourage people from "exploring and becoming a part of another culture."[124]

Asian American hip-hop artists are subsequently accused of mimicry and such accusations limit their success. Many older interviewees expressed that Asian Americans gravitating towards hip-hop culture in the Bay Area is "unquestioned," "unchallenged," or "clichéd" since Filipino American hip-hop artists are guaranteed a predominately Asian American audience thereby creating a "comfort zone."[125] Despite the relative comfort Asian American hip-hop artists experience in the Bay Area, such success is rarely achieved on a national level and is regulated by in large to metropolitan areas with high numbers of Asian

Pacific Islander populations. One interviewee noted, however, that the success of Filipino American hip-hop artists is constrained by the glass ceiling:

> Asian American artists can look up to the Roots, Mos Def and Common, but they are only going to be right here. [She places her hand as if signifying a ceiling]. The general society is going to think Asian. They do not put Asian and rap together. To them it is just black and white. And it is weird to me because what makes a white person rap when they are so culturally different? What makes them better than a Filipino guy that's struggled with his life? Why can't they rap something and get paid for it? It has to do with society, acceptance, and how they want to view Asians. Who else is out there right now? [126]

She and many other interviewees extended this predicament to celebrities masking their Asian heritage resulting in Asian Americans seeking representation in the media by "digging and researching" ancestries.[127] She asserts that mixed Asians do not reveal their ancestries by "hav[ing] their Asian flags around. They use a black or white flag first."[128] Thus, Filipino American hip-hop artists are regulated to a certain degree of success dictated by content thereby marginalizing their offerings to a particular politicized audience. For example, Blue Scholars' *Bayani* (2007) features two AK-47's on the album's cover as opposed to the more accessible Black Eyed Peas whose themes are more palatable and safe despite efforts to pepper their releases with the Filipino American epic "Bebot" (2006) and the Veteranos focused "The Apl Song" (2004) to mainstream audiences.[129]

Conclusion

> This is for all my Asian American brothers and sisters, wishing you a happy Asian American history month. – Chuck D[130]

Blackness holds a substantial alluring amount of power over Asian American youth through the guise of hip-hop. For youth growing up in low-income communities, hip-hop reflects as noted the "nitty grittiness of life."[131] It also serves as a display of power – a power that is an alluring alternative to the image of the docile and passive model minority. What is more intriguing is the cross-cultural collaborations and frictions between Asian Americans and African Americans in times of civil unrest.

On New Year's Day, 2009, Oscar Grant, a young African American male was apprehended by Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) police officers, thrown to the ground, shot in the back, and killed. The grievous act was captured on cellphone cameras and later broadcasted throughout the Bay Area that sparked outrage and resulted in two nights of rioting. The civil unrest following the killing was presented as a black uprising glossing over the multiethnic composition of the rioters. Asian American youth took part of the protests; however, media coverage would claim otherwise despite numerous photos proving the multiethnic composition of the uprisings. During the second night of unrest, I witnessed a multiracial collective of youth protesting in front of Oakland's city hall calling for peace. Soon after I left, the youth took over Broadway. Following protests at Fruitvale BART station resulted in cases of police brutality directed against a number of my Asian American former students and colleagues.

The announcement of the verdict on July, 8, 2010 of involuntary manslaughter inspired a number of responses on part of the city of Oakland to keep the peace. Mayor Ron Dellums arranged a band and a DJ to play at the steps of City Hall that was meagerly attended. Most took to the streets of downtown closing down a number of city blocks between 12th and 14th and

Broadway and that later erupted in looting and destruction of stores. I, too, attempted to keep the peace by DJ-ing in San Francisco by playing roots conscious reggae tunes that spoke to the injustice committed by the legal system.

Later that evening, after DJ-ing, I had a conversation with two white urban professionals sitting at the bar. They were complaining about the rioting that occurred, unaware that a flier detailing the killing of Oscar Grant affixed to the DJ booth watched over us. The couple exonerated the crimes of the white police officer, Johannes Mehserle, claiming an "obvious accident" was turned into a bigger incident because of the "race card." Thus, I was caught in-between, cast as an honorary white, not expected to be an ally to a deceased black man and a perceived black social movement. Ultimately, my experience that evening speaks to the larger issue of Asian American identity politics within the black and white binary. Elaine Kim (2006) writes:

> In many ways, Asian Americans are positioned on the in-between-on the cusp, at the interstice, in the buffer zone-of Asia and America, between black and white, between old-timer and newcomer, between mainstreamed and marginalized. Yet the in-between is a precarious and dangerous position to occupy if we are not fully cognizant of where we are and what our position means in the larger picture. Armed with that cognizance, we have the potential to participate creatively and courageously in shaping of the social, political, and cultural environment.[132]

Indeed, my actions earlier that evening in Oakland and later that night in San Francisco, speak to the amount of courage and energy necessary to address social injustices. However, my discussion with the white urbanites suggests a pinning between black and white, which in turn marginalizes Asian American voices. Kim continues:

> What seems to infuriate some people the most is thought of an un-ungrateful Asian American siding with other people of color, presumably against whites. They want to hold onto their notion of Asian Americans as docile honorary white people whose very existence proves that other people of color are lazy and stupid and that racism does not exist in U.S. society.[133]

Knowing my "honorary white" status, I did not engage the white patrons, but rather ended the conversation abruptly. Looking at the Oscar Grant flier, my heart sank. Playing tunes previously in an effort to "keep the peace," such precautionary measures took on a new meaning when catapulted into conversation regarding Oscar Grant. In the end, I was, as many Asian Americans are, caught in-between.

Chapter Three: "We Are Family:" the Asian American DJ Scene

During the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Asian American mobile DJ crews became a common fixture at gatherings of peoples of Asian Pacific Islander descent in the Bay Area and Los Angeles.[134] Within these gatherings the importance of the family unit was undeniable. In the late 1990s, for instance, I attended a number of parties at the "430 house" (a home rented by Filipino American Academy of Art students) in Daly City. Before such parties, friends and I would walk to the local supermarket to buy food and beverages. After preparations were finished, partygoers played the drum set in the garage while a scratch DJ performed his turntable skills. As the night progressed, a number of DJs took turns on the turntables throughout the house: in bedrooms, the garage and the living room with additional equipment brought by visiting DJs. Mimicking the three tiered club environments of San Francisco, DJs specialized in different musical styles dictated by the collections brought: in one room one would hear jungle, another hip-hop while in another, house music. The aforementioned informal dance parties were known as "house parties" and knowledge of these events passed through word of mouth and insured an intimate crowd and a safe environment. House party DJs usually went on to become professional DJs or turntablists spinning at local venues and/or producing albums.

The support network of DJs of Asian Pacific Islander descent demonstrates that these DJs implement survival strategies collectively in order to further their careers. Asians in America have a long history of pooling their resources together collectively in order to survive in the US. In the case of the Chinese, many male migrants falsified documents in order to gain entry into the U.S. as "Paper Sons" since they were denied the right to form families, naturalize, and/or immigrate.[135] Gerstel and Sarkisian (2008) caution that such "fictive kin" networks should not be "glorified;" however, the role such networks play in Bay Area DJ culture speaks to the

resourcefulness of Asian American DJs that collectively pull their finances together in order to obtain equipment, hold events, and form crews.[136]

In this chapter, I examine how identity politics figures into the careers of Asian American DJs through the collection of oral histories culled from participating and observing the DJ scene. In addition, a number of releases by Asian American DJs will be analyzed to highlight how ethnicity impacts their releases. This chapter reveals how ethnicity influences Asian American DJs in the following ways: First, I will document the rise of mobile DJ units in the Bay Area by investigating influences and supportive familial networks that led to their ultimate success. Second, I will explore how Asian American DJ crews strategically employ ethnicity in their releases. Lastly, this chapter aims to interrogate the utility of the term "Asian American" as it applies to DJ culture.

The Cultural Influences and Support Systems of Asian American DJs

In this section, I will reveal the influences and support networks that fostered the careers of aspiring Asian American DJs in order to show how the family network played an integral role in their success. I will do this in two ways: first by highlighting the influence of radio and its effect on shaping the identity of aspiring DJs; second by exploring how the use of equipment and familial spaces provided the foundation for future success of DJs.

Many interviewees expressed the importance of radio as the primary influence on their decision to become DJs. Some participants recall following the topforty charts as a formative experience that led some to record broadcasts to cassette by utilizing double cassette decks to

construct mix tapes. Cassette mixes afforded DJs the opportunity to make satisfactory mixes without a mixer or turntables.

Making mixes outside of the bedroom, however, hinged upon using legitimate gear including turntables and a mixer. Keyes (2002) writes, "[t]he preferred turntables are the Technics SL-1200 because of their pitch-control capability and action-stability control."[137] These turntables referred to as the "1200s" or "Tech 12s" cost several hundred dollars and their prohibitive price influenced many to pool their finances collectively to afford the coveted gear. Those who could not afford 1200s bought used turntables and mixers at local flea markets, thrift stores, and/or received gear handed down from their relatives. One participant recalls her cousins' DJ unit:

> They would spin on the weekends. Sometimes they would bring their DJ equipment to our house and just play records with whatever collections they had in their crates. Two of my cousins were really into it. Then the eldest went into the army and gave all his equipment to the other guy. He was doing it on the side with all his friends. He lived in Fremont. I do not know what happened to the equipment. I think it went to some other cousin.[138]

While some DJs benefited from the handed down of equipment from familial ties, some participants were not as fortunate and had to utilize second-rate gear and/or gear that was available at parties. This practice is often referred to as "dirt style" (see Figure 1). One DJ recalls the experience:

> We were doing it dirt style. We would turn up at parties and ask if they had turntables and they would say 'yes.' We would show up and it's their mom's turntable and a cassette player! There were gigs like that. It made me realize that

> that is how a lot of folks were starting out – learning more of the genesis of hip-hop in Jamaica. The emcee became important when the DJ would flip the record.[139]

Doing it "dirt style" involved practicing for hours on second-rate equipment seasoning aspiring DJs but also honing their skills for the eventual purchase of 1200s.

A number of interviewees recalled having DJ mobile units as part of their extended family and they would often hold parties at family events, school dances, garages, and/or abandoned warehouses. Many participants recall converting their garages into makeshift discos to "attract girls" and these small events were a precursor to full-scale parties.[140] One participant recalls routinely opening park gymnasiums for DJs to practice that led to events being held in Saint Augustine Church to a predominately Filipino crowd. This sizable market led an outsider, a gay Puerto Rican, to hold events called *Imagine* to cater to the Filipino audience. One recounts the story of Imagine, "He was this rich, Puerto Rican, gay guy, who loved Filipinos. He threw these big events and everybody was pretty much Filipino – you know, DJ battles, Christmas battles, and breakdance crew battles. It was the time of performers."[141] Imagine's success was primarily due to having an age requirement of sixteen and up for his events, since youth under the age of eighteen and/or twenty one were restricted from attending most night clubs.

Support of DJ culture, however, was not necessarily universal. One DJ recounted his parents' preference for classical music as stifling: "At that time we would talk about the misunderstanding of our parents, because at that time parents listened to classical since they grew up on it on the Philippines. We wanted to be as far away from that as we could."[142] This led many aspiring DJs to raid their parents' classical collections to utilize them into DJ mixes.[143] This proved to be highly ironic because the parental objects of sophistication were

integrated into DJ mixes adding social commentary on the parental disapproval of hip-hop culture.

As warehouse parties and later raves became popular in the mid to late 1980s, Filipino youth who've already established themselves as DJs joined the burgeoning scene. The primary reason for the rise of such parties was that many nightclubs enforced restrictive age requirements.[144] One participant recalls how these illegal parties took place:

> Kids came up with this idea, since Carson is a poor community, of breaking into a warehouse and just taking over. One time they took over this run down warehouse near a freeway. It was strangest people – glam rock guys, people wearing parachute pants, baggy pants, and lowriders. Everybody got along.[145]

Inside warehouse parties a generator powered lights and music equipment with a band playing on one side of the space while a DJ on the other. This practice continued until the authorities shut it down within a month because the "sheriff found out and raided it."[146]

The success of the aforementioned parties hinged upon the reputation of the DJ. One recalls his diverse musical palate as an influencing factor in his rise to prominence:

> I was emerging as a selector at parties. People found that I could pick the records at rock parties. I would pick the Beatles, Rolling Stones, throw in some Motown and Talking Heads to keep it going. At the time, I did not know how to juggle records. I just knew what flowed. I got a reputation throughout high school that I could dig through the records and pull things out.[147]

Musical knowledge was deciding factor in the success of a party and oftentimes resulted in peculiar mixes on the dance-floor. One recalls the intermingling of subcultures:

> [At] high school dances we would have [dance] circles [transforming into] *Soul Train* dances. It would evolve into weird things. There was a common music that everyone liked: 'Little Red Corvette' by Prince, Michael Jackson, and Culture Club. You would see breakers, pop and lockers, glam rockers, and everyone dancing. When the pop guys sang it would be this common thing.[148]

The intermingling of subcultures is significant because the segregation of nightclubs by musical taste subsequently became the norm in the late 1980s and 1990s. For example, the popular San Francisco nightclub DV8 featured three floors of differing music: hip-hop, house, and rave. Some house parties replicated this format by having multiple rooms with DJs specializing in particular genres.

By the early 1990s, Asian Pacific Islander DJ crews started to gain prominence and recognition from audiences beyond the Bay Area. Without a strong familial framework and close-knit network to facilitate their endeavors, it is hard to imagine their subsequent successes. More importantly, the success of DJ crews highlights the resourcefulness and resiliency of Asian Pacific Islanders carving out their space collectively within the larger hip-hop community.

ISP and the Muting of Race and Ethnicity

In 1992, a local hip-hop show, *Home Turf*, televised footage of the world's first DJ band FM20 across the Bay Area.[149] The footage featured DJs Qbert, Mix Master Mike, and Apollo three DJs of Filipino ancestry. FM20 soon became the Rock Steady DJs and later Invisibl Skratch Piklz (ISP). The footage is striking because it captures the multiracial makeup of Bay Area hip-hop culture particularly artists of Filipino descent. Indeed, the crew's ethnicity played a role in the hiring of FM20 for a number of Asian American community events.

What preceded ISP's rise to fame, however, was a curious muting of their ethnic backgrounds.[150] In other words, ISP did not market themselves as Filipino American DJs, but rather as the penultimate DJ crew that refused to have their releases be defined by their ethnicities. In this section, I am interested in how DJs of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry negotiated ethnicity through performance and marketing. By analyzing video and releases made by ISP, the Beat Junkies and DJ Qbert, I hope to shed light on how the aforementioned artists diverted attentions from their ethnicities onto their DJ-ing skills.

The initial success of ISP hinged upon the utilization of a supportive network through mobile DJ units. As the previous section revealed, DJs throughout the Bay Area and Los Angeles held dances and parties at a variety of venues that provided a solid foundation for their subsequent success. Once they achieved a degree of popularity, DJs began to hold residencies at a number of nightclubs showcasing their turntable techniques a practice that Keyes (2002) refers to as "turntablism."[151]

ISP's notoriety among Asian American circles led many to support their performances. One participant recalls their performances as revelatory and cites that their events felt as though she was "hanging out at her cousin's house" while attending "fiestas back home" in southern California.[152] ISP's sound resonated with her because, she identified with how the group constructed music by "pulling bits and pieces" from a variety of sources that were representative of her Filipino American identity.[153]

Claiming one's cultural heritage, however, did not necessarily apply to the DJs in the politically charged environment of California in the 1990s. Throughout the 1990s, voter initiatives passed anti-immigration legislation such as Proposition 127, 209, and 227.[154] Simultaneously, hip-hop originating from California's inner cities such as Oakland, San

Francisco, and Los Angeles reflected the racial politics through the perspectives of disenfranchised black and Latino men. Thus, Asian Americans hip-hop artists challenged racial expectations and such artists were often met with suspicion. DJs, however, circumvented the expectations of emcee-ing in favor of turntable skills that relied less on vocal prowess.

Pursuing DJ-ing was no easier and many note that they had to prove themselves not only within hip-hop circles but also the community at large. According to an interview of DJ Rhettmatic of the Beat Junkies, he had to "work tens times as hard" in the face of negative perceptions from Asian American community members and the larger hip-hop community.[155] He continued by stating that he is a "hip-hop head that happens to be Filipino." Likewise, some participants of this study noted that Qbert's ethnicity did not play a factor in their support of the artist. One participant claimed, "Qbert did not proclaim that he is Filipino, but he is the best at what he does. Everyone knows it. You did not like him because he is Filipino. You like him because he is the best, no matter what! There is no argument about it."[156] Such statements reflect the cultural capital many Filipino American DJs cultivate to gain entry and respect within the larger hip-hop community.[157]

Once ISP achieved their hard earned success by winning multiple championships, the crew released a number of albums that either marketed or masked their ethnicities. For example, ISP's initial releases on Dirt Style Records during the early 1990s featured a continued emphasis on hip-hop inspired graffiti artwork from artists of Asian Pacific Islander descent (i.e, Dream, Spie, and Pak 1) and this trend continued until the release of *Invisbl Skratch Piklz vs. Da Klams Uv Deth* (1996). The album features a chopstick like font announcing the title of the album under which a number of anime-inspired robots stand in formation. The crew's faces are featured prominently on the reverse cover. This release was followed by DJ Flare's *Dirtstyle*

Deluxe Shampoo Edition (1997) the cover of which features a number of humorous photos of people of Asian Pacific Islander descent wearing a variety of masks. This tradition continued and is evident in a number of future ISP releases such as the five volumes of the *Shiggar Fraggar* series (1998-2000) and *Buck Tooth Wizardz* (1997). Although the humor and science fiction-like inspirations are evident an alternative reading suggests that the crew was distancing itself from their cultural heritages in an attempt to market themselves based on skill rather than ethnicity. Once their international fame was achieved their identities became more apparent and the usage of masks lessened. For example, Qbert's release *Wave Twisters* (1998) features the DJ wearing hypnotic shades rather than a mask. When ISP's Mix Master Mike became the DJ for the Beastie Boys, he was suddenly propelled into the mainstream spotlight. Other members of ISP followed suit by revealing their identities without masks. Soon, ISP disbanded, and Qbert relocated to Hawaii, developed the mixer and turntable (the QFO) for Vestax; recently, he toured the Philippines.[158]

Qbert's career after the breakup of ISP continues the masking of ethnicity and a number of interviews online and in print attests to this. DJ Revolution's interview with Qbert for the Cut (2011) reveals the DJ's thoughts on ethnicity**:**

> I never really thought of it as a Filipino thing. As an artist you are just making music for everybody. I wasn't doing it as a Filipino thing or an Asian thing. It was just art. In Daly City there was a ton of Filipino DJs. I just thought it was just normal to be a DJ. But there are Latin DJs, black DJs, white DJs – you know Frisco is a melting pot…over here everyone is mixed, so it doesn't matter. There is a lot of Asians but they were probably afraid…I was oblivious to it…like I wasn't supposed to be there, but I didn't know I wasn't supposed to be there![159]

The DJ's obliviousness to the issues of race and ethnicity within the highly competitive culture of DJ-ing indicates how such identities are less of an issue within the Bay Area hip-hop scene but may hold more weight upon competing elsewhere.

Qbert's obsession with science fiction influences his spirituality and highlights his disengagement from the issues of race and ethnicity within hip-hop culture. Qbert is often described as an "extraterrestrial being" and he claims his primary motivation is aliens: "Since [E]arth is kinda like a primitive planet, what about the more advanced civilizations? How does their music sound? So, I would imagine whatever they're doing and I guess that is how I come up with ideas."[160] He also looks to outer space for influences:

> Sometimes I even look for influences in outer space. It's definitely gotten me some crazy theories about life…I used to check the net for guys who had been abducted and had been to outer space and gotten to hear what music sounds like on other planets. I never heard anything but I have learned a lot about advanced civilizations on different planets. The really advanced races are all about love and their lives are about helping each other. It got me to be very spiritual and it got me in a very spiritual mindset.[161]

His "spiritual mindset" is found throughout a number of subsequent interviews. For example, an interview with Sucker Punch TV (2011) features the DJ arguing against cultural separatism by claiming that the "universe is one energy."[162] He reiterates these views in an interview with Womp TV (2011) by stating that "everything is God" and that "everything is one energy."[163] Qbert continues saying that life is "temporary" and is akin to living "life as a character in a video game."[164] His sci-fi animated film *Wave Twisters* (2001) reinforces such statements and is

acknowledged as the first musical to feature music entirely composed by turntables. The cover of the film is inspired by Activision's Atari 2600 video game cartridge *Pitfall!* (1982) and Qbert's recent contributions to *DJ Hero 2* (2010) continues the DJ's video game obsession.[165]

Despite the DJ's distancing from race and ethnicity, people of Asian Pacific Islander descent have embraced Qbert as a celebrity. For example, Filipinos in the Philippines have embraced Qbert by inviting him to tour Manila.[166] In addition, a Filipino American artist recently plaster casted his hands.[167] Qbert also has participated in concerts that cater to Asian American audiences. For example, he has recently performed in a concert with Asian American musicians Mochipet, Joyo Velarde, and Lyrics Born in 2008. Furthermore, both Qbert's *Demolition Pumpkin Squeeze Musik* (1994) and *Buck Tooth Wizardz* (1997) were distributed by Japanese independent hip-hop labels and sold in the U.S. as costly imports. Such releases infers that the DJ cultivated a large fan-base in Japan.

For some Filipino American fans of ISP their sound was uniquely Filipino and this in turn may have influenced the crew's masking of their heritages. One interviewee asserted that there is a connection between ISP's turntablism and indigenous Filipino gamelan (*kulingtang*).[168] However, ISP distanced themselves from their cultural backgrounds on many of their releases. In this sense defining their work as culturally Filipino limited marketing potential in a genre obsessed with ancestry and authenticity. In this sense ISP kept it real by masking their identities and let the product and their awards speak for themselves.

Going Global: Frictions and Collaborations within Pan-Asian DJ Alliances

Popular culture from Asia and the Pacific influenced American and European tastes throughout the 1990s. Referred to as "Indo-Chic" in the United Kingdom and "Asian-Chic" in the United

States both terms highlight issues of cultural appropriation and Orientalism.[169] Although the term functions as a derogatory term to describe the West's fascination with the East, I argue that the "Asian Chic" also applies to Asian Americans exploring their roots through the consumption of popular culture.[170]

"Asian Chic" and DJ culture were intertwined during the 1990s in the Bay Area and this period was marked by a number of turntablists from and/or having ancestral ties to Asia and the Pacific. I distinctly recall attending concerts by Japanese DJ Krush and the ISP within the same year as an act of showing support for Asian and Asian American hip-hop artists. This act of support is often cited as a homogenizing force, however, such a critique overlooks how the term can be employed strategically as an act of allegiance between DJs of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry.[171] In this section, I will explore how ethnicity and nationality shape the identities of DJs of Asian Pacific Islander descent through my own personal alliances with DJs. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the possibilities for forging new Asian American identities.

The success of a DJ hinges upon being part of a collective, crew or a group. For example, Qbert's success stems from his belonging to FM20, Rock Steady DJs and later ISP. Such crews set the blueprint for aspiring DJs to form alliances and I followed suit by forming a partnership with a Japanese DJ and producer Whizkey. We had met each other through an Asian Pacific Islander designer group called @430 at the Academy of Art, San Francisco. Recognizing our affinity for a similar sound, we soon began sharing our record finds, but soon realized we were having a common experience in record stores.

During the 1990s, Japanese international students routinely bought records to ship back to Japan.[172] These buyers often had to resort to selling records since many did not have visas to work within the United States. Those who shipped records back to Japan made a profit since the

yen was stronger than the dollar. These "hard-core aficionados" were known as "*otakus*" and these buyers sent shockwaves throughout the record buying public and made collecting highly competitive.[173]

DJs of Asian Pacific Islander descent were misidentified as either Japanese buyers and/or as local DJ heroes while digging for records. Asian American DJs were often thought of as Japanese buyers and often treated with disdain, suspicion, and/or outright discrimination by sellers. Alternatively, I have been mistaken for a member of ISP while record hunting. Such instances mark the often tenuous relationships between Asian ethnics within the larger Asian and Asian American category. For example, one DJ recounts Japanese women asking him his ethnicity after his set. After telling the women, he was Filipino, they recoiled revealing prejudiced attitudes held by some Japanese against those from the Philippines.[174]

Given our common experiences as outsiders within the larger record collecting community, Whizkey and I were wary of stressing our ethnicity, so we chose to emphasize our DJ skills and our affinity for reggae music. The DJ recalled his fondness for the genre:

> For me I was looking at reggae from an outsider view because I grew up in Japan. So I did not make connection as reggae as Rasta music. So I have appreciation for how it evolved in England after Jamaican immigrants moved over there and created Lovers Rock. So people like Adrian Sherwood, Massive Attack and the Bristol collective scene fuse punk, funk, dub and new wave into one music style. That was more [of a] natural progression.[175]

The DJ's retelling of the path reggae music followed from Jamaica to the UK displays how the music morphed into new genres under the influence of external influences. Furthermore, he notes that the reggae lifestyle manifests itself differently depending upon one's location:

> So Santa Cruz people connect reggae with dreadlocks. Logically and religiously, I do not [think] white dreads exist! Maybe there is a similarity in hippie culture that really remains strong in California, so those [are the] types of things you see- White people in hemp clothes they wear[ing] dreadlocks listening to Bob Marley and Rasta music. Whereas England people have a baldhead but they listen to ska and dub.[176]

His insights are significant because they highlight how music manifests differently depending on its location.

Nationality and ethnicity, however, played a significant role while DJ-ing despite our attempts to disengage from the identifiers. At our first gig together, I recall mixing reggae and UK hip-hop along with jazz. While mixing numerous danceable jazz tracks from the CTI label, two Japanese women stood before us as Whizkey adjusting the levels and as I mixed the vinyl. Their observation of our performance was flattering, but nevertheless I could not shake thinking about ideas ethnicity and nationality all while mixing. A year before hand, I had attended a concert by Japanese DJ Krush as an act of pan-Asian solidarity. Now, I found myself not only DJ-ing with a Japanese DJ but also being watched by Japanese fans.

The turntablism craze officially came to an end when ISP disbanded in 2000. Chennault (2005) writes,

> In the hyperkinetic world of hip hop, fortunes are won and lost, trends rise and fall, and careers wax and wane in what seems like the blink of an eye. Five years is a lifetime, and it's been nearly that long since the demise of what we once called turntablism – today the term is passé, taboo, a cliché that most DJs would rather distance themselves from.[177]

As a result, there were fewer gigs and DJ culture in the Bay Area became stagnant. By the mid-2000s, however, a number of nostalgic DJs attempted to resurrect the scene through forays into music production. Whizkey managed to press a 45rpm single combining hip-hop beats with a bassline sample of Sister Nancy's dancehall hit "Bam Bam" (1993). The single "Desolation Dub" (2003) featured prominently during our reunion as DJ partners from 2009-2010. On one occasion, I played the extended version of "Ghost Town" by the Specials (1981) followed by a contemporary Jah Screehie remix that sampled Andrea True Connection's "More, More, More" (1975). A short, petite woman, dressed in black approached the turntables, leaned over and asked, "what kind of music is this?" in a thick Eastern European accent. Although, I answered, "dub," upon reflection should I have answered "Asian American," "Jamaican," or simply "ours"

Conclusion

> We're lost in music
>
> We're caught in a trap – Sister Sledge

It was a balmy September afternoon, in Westminster, California, as two fellow DJs and I pulled into the gridlocked parking lot of a Vietnamese strip-mall in Little Saigon.[178] Hungry and homesick, I let out a sigh of relief to be around so many people of Asian descent and their businesses. While drinking *Café Sau Da* (Vietnamese iced-coffee) and eating spring rolls, my friend shared her migration story of being "dumped off" in Westminster and her subsequent responsibility as a translator for her parents.[179] She recalls hanging out at the very same strip-mall as a newly arrived refugee watching the "Crunchies" – Vietnamese girls with death defying aerosol-ed hairdos and their tough boyfriends loitering in the parking lot while Freestyle and Hi-

NRG music blasted from their cars – the first sounds she heard in America.[180] She acquired a fondness for that sound and argued that it is in her blood and this is the reason why she DJs. Her evocative comment served as reminder of a similar claim from another participant who likened the turntable techniques of ISP being rooted in biology: "That instrument [the Technics 1200] is a part of them [ISP] just like the saxophone was a part of [Charlie] Parker and the horn was a part of Miles [Davis]. If [hip-hop] is going to evolve it needs to come up with something new."[181] Those who claim that the success of Asian American DJ's are rooted in biology do so because they fear that the music they purchase, produce, and perform will be taken away from them. For example, an interview with DJ Fresh by the *San Francisco Bayview* (2009) revealed the black DJ's dismissal of DJ-ing being a "Filipino Phenomenon" by calling it "bullshit."[182] Such a reaction highlights the on-going battle of legitimacy for Asian American DJs despite the successes of ISP, the Beat Junkies, and Qbert. On numerous occasions, I have encountered Filipino Americans declaring that is DJ-ing "is in their blood." I have interpreted this as a response to those who consider Filipino American involvement in DJ culture as being suspect. Thus, it is no surprise that some Asian Americans fans and DJs have linked their successes as being biologically predetermined.

DJs of Asian Pacific Islander descent of the Bay Area and Los Angeles have a long history of establishing crews that are aided by family networks and the utilization of existing spaces to hold events. The inventive use of space was made clear as I was whisked away to the restaurant where I met Akaida, a Japanese American DJ. I helped set up the turntables, speakers, and found a table suitable enough for our gig. During our sets an elder of the Vietnamese bride came up to us and remarked, "I usually do not like this music, but I like how you two are mixing

it!" Soon the dance-floor filled with dancers of all ages. While spinning my set, a young male of the bride asked for the names of selections while filing through my records.

An investigation of DJ culture among Asian Americans reveals the continued interplay of family, ethnicity and nationality. Gear has been handed down from generation to generation, and those lacking capital "do it dirt style" until proper equipment is acquired. In the past, those who have chosen to pursue DJ-ing and turntablism have met opposition from the larger Asian American and the greater hip-hop community. As a result, these DJs employ their ethnicities strategically and in some cases mask their identities in order to redirect focus on their turntable skills. The proliferation of DJs of Asian Pacific Islander descent on a domestic and global scale affected their experiences during record collecting and/or during performances as a case of ethnic misidentification. Although such occurrences highlight the shortcomings of the term "Asian American," common interests rooted in musical taste bring about idealized pan-Asian unions breaking through the barrier of music as being a "trap" but rather as an escape from the reality of constant legitimization. "People in the United States are lost," said Whizkey and music serves as the catalyst to find themselves.[183]

Chapter Four: Getting Up: Asian Americans Graffiti Artists Claiming Space

During the mid-1980s and 1990s a burgeoning graffiti scene flourished throughout the Bay Area and within this scene many Asian American graffiti artists rose to prominence. Artists within the "graf" scene referred to each other as "writers." Influenced by hip-hop films and graffiti books, these writers purchased markers, spray paints, and scrapbooks to master their craft by creating tags and pieces and by collectively organizing as crews. Often crews were built upon a shared dissatisfaction with the status quo and this led many Asian American writers to form bounds with fellow Asian Pacific Islanders. TDK (Those Damn Kids), for instance, represented a crew that was predominately Asian American and its membership included Dream, Pak 1, and Spie.[184]

Graffiti became the ideal option for many Asian American youth to participate in hip-hop culture since prevailing attitudes about hip-hop restricted their initial success as emcees and DJs. One participant recalled how prevalent graffiti culture became among Filipino Americans:

> The graffiti artists were there. You knew who they were. But it became more so in high school with graffiti. The tagging started coming up in 1985 and 1986 and graffiti art you saw more since everyone was tagging on the buses. Students who were graffiti artists, you would see it on their backpacks. They would also carry their own sketchbooks.[185]

Graffiti's popularity among Filipino Americans led many to become recognized within the youth culture. For example, Crayone was featured in the pioneering graffiti book *Spraycan Art* (1987) and his artwork influenced the subsequent generation of Asian American writers. I recall purchasing the aforementioned text because its cover featured a graffiti caricature of an Asian youth with a spray can. The collection resonated with me at the time since many of my peers

were involved in graffiti culture.

I propelled myself into the "graf" scene during the mid-1990s while living in San Francisco's Chinatown and the experience showed me how the authorities disproportionately target certain communities.[186] After multiple run-ins with the police, I opted out of the scene when graffiti became a felony.[187] Twelve years later, I found myself within the scene again only this time as an ethnographer. I documented the completion of a commissioned mural in the Mission District only to be apprehended by the police for not paying a bus fare while the artist and I boarded the bus. I was surrounded by five police officers that questioned the contents of my knap sack: multiple markers and a sketchbook. After repeated questioning of the legality of my belongings, I was fined one hundred and seventy five dollars.

Such recollections highlight how integral Asian American writers are a part of the graffiti scene of the Bay Area. This chapter investigates the identities of Asian American writers in a culture that thrives on the tenuous and often contradictory expectations of fame, anonymity, and authenticity. I hope to reveal the trajectory of graffiti artists of Asian Pacific Islander descent from the underground to the mainstream by showcasing the careers of Dream and Twist to highlight the effects and constraints of fame and notoriety and its resultant impact on graffiti culture.

Anonymity, Identity, and Asian American Writers

> Space [is a] influential factor in contemporary culture…power and authority are uneasily distributed throughout society, with space emerging as one important vector among many for the expressions of dominant-subordinate relations within the hegemonic order.[188]

Writing wouldn't be writing if it wasn't illegal. It gotta be illegal. – Dream[189]

The anonymity of graffiti culture allowed writers of Asian Pacific Islander descent to excel and establish themselves as artists. McDonald (2005) notes that graffiti culture provides an amount of anonymity for writers since the other outlets of hip-hop expression (DJ-ing, emcee-ing, and breakdancing) thrive on performance.[190] While this may be the case, however, it overlooks the pressure within graffiti culture to become famous. Lewisohn writes, "[f]ame is the name of the game in graffiti writing."[191] Thus, to ensure a writer's popularity, one has to "get up" or tag as many areas as possible to become visible within the hip-hop culture and the public at large. As the scene progressed into the 1990s, this included writers scaling structures to "throw up" quick two-color "dubs" or complicated multicolored "pieces" (also known as "burners") onto the top of buildings.[192] In this section, I will analyze the careers and work of two writers – Dream and Twist – and how the experience of each writer reveals how the anonymity of graffiti culture affected their identities in different ways.

Asian American writers were largely unknown since the scene's strict code of anonymity that restricted knowledge of their identities to the select few. For example, Dream, a Filipino American artist from TDK and the West Oakland hip-hop collective Hobo Junction created works for Capital Tax's single "I Can't Believe It" (1993) and Saafir's *Boxcar Sessions* (1994) the later featuring two train car length piece of the album's name. Only those within hip-hop circles knew Dream's identity and such a tight-knit community supported their talented artists. For example, the Invisibl Skratch Piklz (ISP) featured Dream and his TDK partners Pak 1 and Spie on a number of releases on the Dirt Style Records imprint. The utilization of graffiti pieces

by TDK to sell releases represented an authentic alternative to the mainstream gangster posturing that was pervasive throughout the rap industry of the early 1990s.

While the insular nature of Bay Area's hip-hop community protected the identities of its writers, artist galleries propelled them into the forefront raising questions regarding authenticity. For example, Barry McGee, also known as Twist, was the most popular and recognized graffiti artist during the 1990s. Like Futura 2000, Keith Haring, and Jean Michel Basquiat before him, his pieces were featured in galleries and soon became popular.[193] Although Twist continued to create illegal pieces while being shown in galleries, his street credibility diminished, as he became a more mainstream artist. In addition, Twist sparked controversy with his shoe design for Adidas (2006) that featured a caricature of a young Asian boy as buck toothed with slanted eyes called the Ray Fong and also for courting a corporate contract.

Twist and Dream's careers highlight the divergent paths graffiti artists take – corporate or community based – and reflect the larger expectations placed on writers to remain authentic. As graffiti culture became commonplace by the late 1990s, writers soon found themselves in a position to make a profit. For Twist, his gallery showings increased his global exposure and recognition ultimately led to his contract with Adidas. For Dream, the community-minded writer, his path was restricted to Bay Area hip-hop artists with little capital and to local community based galleries. In comparison, Twist's career path was more profitable compared to Dream's; however, the notion of profiteering within hip-hop culture highlights the contradictory constraints of fame within graffiti culture. Since many writers rebelled against the corporate power structures with their works, they were soon courted by the very powers they were critiquing. Lewisohn writes:

> The sadly ironic factor in this process is that as soon as the very marketing executives and advertising agencies against whom the artists had been protesting caught up to the fact that street-art-style imagery had a hip-by-association rebelliousness attached to it, they started using the format to sell their products.[194]

As a result, this situation affected the careers and legacies of both artists differently. Whereas Dream was championed as the authentic community minded writer, Twist was deemed as the inauthentic gallery-courting artist: such criticisms revealed the often contradictory expectations within the graffiti scene. Corporate sponsorship, in Twist's case robbed the artist of his anonymity, while Dream's work for the underground retained his anonymity, and therefore made his work more "authentic." Lewisohn writes, "working anonymously, artists are free from the fear that a bad review might upset their future prospects."[195] Thus, Dream's refusal to go mainstream retained his credibility and subjected him to less criticism.

Life After Death: **the Legacy of Mike Dream**

> He was humble,
> Trying to escape the trouble,
> Raised up in the hustle,
> Enlightened by the struggle,
> Memories live forever,
> Never one dies,
> And you are living through your graffiti pieces,
> And son's eyes. – Equipto

The lyrics of Equipto's "My Dream" (2008) declare Mike "Dream" Francisco as the most talented and beloved graffiti artist of the Bay Area. A member of TDK, Dream, who was shot and killed in 2000, had an enormous impact on hip-hop culture in the Bay Area. In this section, I will investigate the impact of Dream's legacy and his posthumous impact on Bay Area hip-hop cultural industries.

Dream's legacy is held in high regard throughout hip-hop circles of the Bay Area largely due to his social consciousness as a writer of color. A letter posted posthumously on a website indicates his politics:

> I went through a consciousness phase in the writing, realizing that 'art for art's sake' was weak and that there was power in the message. I began to understand the roots of my own culture. My Filipino heritage taught me about the struggles and sacrifices of my people for equality in this country, opening my eyes to the racism that surrounds our lives, and all of our brothers and sisters of color. My pieces started to have more content and substance, and each piece meant more than bombing (which is a fundamental part of this writing culture), but had more of a message. My writing has become a part of mental liberation, focusing on issues such as police brutality, national liberation, racism, and rebellion. But, ultimately it is the style of the letters, the words that keep me writing, because to stay in the game, you need to stay on top of your style and ride that shit.[196]

Dream's statement signifies the importance of one's craft in combination with an unrelenting passion for social justice. An interview from a show entitled *No Justice No Peace* (1993) at Oakland's ProArts gallery represents his pursuit of social justice.[197] Dream responds to Melinda Bell's questions regarding graffiti culture with ease by stating he is not a "sell out," that graffiti

art is used as a medium to express anger, and that it provides "a dose of reality" which is characterized by oppression and police brutality.

Dream had an enormous impact of bridging the African American and Asian American communities across the Bay Area as a number of fundraisers held after his passing confirm this. The tenth year anniversary of the writer's death marked a number of parties given across the Bay Area. The largest event, *Dream Day*, held on February 5th, 2010, featured a who's who of the Bay Area hip-hop scene. A number of Asian American artists such as Equipto (of the hip-hop group Bored Stiff), Shortkut, Apollo, and TDK supported the event. Ten years earlier, Saafir of Hobo Junction and members of ISP held a benefit at San Francisco's Justice League.

Many local writers dedicated pieces in remembrance of Dream's body of work and a number of pieces dedicated to the artist have flourished across the Bay Area. *The Dream Wall* is found in the Alemany Farmers Market of San Francisco and features works by a number of artists. *Remembrance is Power (R.I.P.)* features quotes by Dream, Malcolm X, Bob Marley and the Roots. In East Oakland, off of International Boulevard and 52nd, a Dream mural complete with Philippine flag, the Bay Bridge, a BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) train, spray can nozzles, and markers, signals his legacy and neighborhood. The symbolism of the East Oakland mural marks not only his ethnic heritage with the Philippine flag, but also Bay Area pride with the images of the Bay Bridge and BART train, and his work within graffiti culture symbolized by the nozzles and markers. The aforementioned pieces serve as reminder to Dream's legacy of social justice and therefore can be read as politically empowering the community.[198]

Dream's legacy has been upheld not only by hip-hop's writers but also its emcees. For example, Bay Area hip-hop group Various Blends dedicated their album *My Favorite Mistake* (2001) to Dream. The album's dedication marks the merchandising of Dream's legacy through

an establishment of the Dream Legacy Fund for Francisco's fatherless (and recently motherless) child Akil.[199] In addition, hyphy artist Nump released the video *Dream* (2007) that features the artist rapping in front of Dream's pieces along with Asian Pacific Islander women singing the backup vocals.[200] Nump raps the following lyrics indicating Dream's influence:

> You are the reason that my voice is on wax,
>
> Because I see your work,
>
> Tattoos and shirts,
>
> Websites,
>
> And I'm like that's proof that,
>
> You don't gotta to do dirt,
>
> When destiny involved,
>
> It heavily revolves,
>
> If you stick to the script,
>
> And that's it.

Nump's lyrics and video not only attest to Dream's influence but the artist's skill. Nump declares Dream the "king" and proof that success can be achieved through persistence not only against the establishment but also barriers within hip-hop culture dictated by racially exclusive notions.

When the City of Oakland declared February 17th 2010 as "Mike Francisco Dream Day" the passage of the declaration marked the contradictions within graffiti culture. Dream's passion for social justice outshined the illegality of his works transforming graffiti into a socially acceptable medium in organizing circles. Mayor Ron Dellums' declaration, for example, signifies how graffiti culture has become more palatable in political arenas. In addition, during

the second night of civil unrest stemming from the killing of Oscar Grant, Filipinos for Affirmative Action held an event at the Asian Resource Center in Oakland's Chinatown. Behind one of the vendors at the event was a large spray painted banner of a woman of Asian Pacific Islander descent holding a machine gun and child (see Figure 2). Such politically charged imagery has become commonplace within organizing circles and stands in opposition to those pieces found in galleries.

Twist and the Politics of Space

> I like to think of it [graffiti] as something beautiful not antagonizing…the act in itself is antagonizing…It doesn't have the various trappings of the art world…A kid's tag is a kid's tag and that's it! – Twist[201]

Twist, born Barry McGee, was born and raised in San Francisco where he completed a Bachelors of Fine Arts from the Art Institute of San Francisco in 1991. He is half Chinese. Since graduating, McGee has "spent the last two decades successfully engaging audiences by mounting his graffiti-centered art in galleries and museums."[202] Within this section, Twist's cultural influences will be explored to highlight how other cultures besides hip-hop influenced his pursuit of graffiti and how the politics of space influences his work. In addition, I will reveal how graffiti culture's cultural expectation to remain authentic impacts the artist's work.

Barry McGee's introduction to graffiti culture did not occur through hip-hop but rather California's punk rock and hardcore scenes of the 1980s. McGee recalls seeing one writer's work while attending punk shows:

> There was always graffiti in these places and I was just like, 'Who is this guy? I keep on seeing this guy.' There was this one guy, Cuba, he wrote 'Cuba' and it

> was at all the same hardcore shows in the bathroom, on the door, and on the street. And then I was like 'What, who's doing this?' It was different than my idea of what graffiti was before that.[203]

Graffiti at the time was considered vandalism and/or associated with gangs claiming their turf.[204] The influence of graffiti culture had influenced some, such as Bay Area transplant, Cuba, however, the scene registered with only a few individuals whom had traveled to the New York City or were immersed in hip-hop culture. McGee continues how another incident initiated him into the scene:

> We all used to ride scooters and stuff around. And there was this one guy that – this is dumb – we used to go ride our scooters around, like Vespas and Lambrettas. And there was this one guy, he would always carry spray paint in his side panel and at every stop, why he'd just get off and he'd do this huge like...he wrote 'Zotz' or something, and the 'O' was this big cowboy thing, like the 'O' was a big cowboy face. And I was 'Say, what the hell are you doing you know?' And he was like, 'I'm doing graffiti, they're doing this in New York right now.' It was '84 or '85, right around there. And he was like 'Yeah, everyone's doing this stuff in New York and you should try it too. You want to try it or something?' And I was like 'Yeah, I'll give it a try.' And he goes, 'You have to come up with a name first.' There's probably some dumb scooter magazine at the time that was called Twist or something – I think that's how I got it. But I've been stuck with that dumb name ever since.[205]

McGee contends that he was inspired by graffiti since it has the "ability to offend the public."[206] He has also said that he was attracted to graffiti culture since it is a "simple act that really pisses

people off," "excites," or "disturbs people."[207] Once initiated into the culture, Twist honed his craft by getting "schooled" (taught) by Bay Area writers Spie and Dream.[208] Such an alliance suggests a support network among its writers of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry.

Twist's influences, however, extends beyond popular music. The multiracial and multiethnic composition of the Bay Area manifests in multiple murals found throughout the neighborhoods of San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley. San Francisco's Mission District boasts the highest number of murals found in the Bay Area and artists of Latino descent craft many of these murals.[209]

Space is a recurring theme running throughout McGee's work that questions the notion of private property. Twist claims that graffiti allows the dispossessed to claim territory as theirs:

> And just taking a space and doing it – they [writers] are making a statement. Claiming a spot on an abandoned building, so people see. I think it's a pretty big move for someone who doesn't have a voice to claim: 'I don't have anything but I have this, at least I have this, on this building.' It provides a feeling of accomplishment and ownership over something: 'I own that. That's mine.'[210]

The claiming of space is a reoccurring theme within graffiti culture. Hoch (2006) writes,

> Poor youth are putting their codified names on public transit, schools, and property as if to say, 'We own this – this is ours,' but also a highly evolved language emerging from groups of young people (crews) who are battling for graffiti stakes and fame.[211]

The lack of ownership propels many youth to tag property as theirs and graffiti is thereby declared an act of vandalism.[212]

McGee argues that the corporate monopolization of space has an ill affect on everyday people who are bombarded with advertisements dictating how people should "look, act and feel."[213] He continues on the damaging effects of advertising:

> To me, if there's commercial jingles from the '70s or '80s that I remember and that are stuck in my head, that's damage to me. Like you're driving down the street and all of a sudden you're humming along to some commercial that you remember when you were a kid – to me that's far more damaging. The billboards are very subversive, and advertising is very subversive, whereas most of the stuff that's done on the street is very close to the truth...I know why it exists. There's people that have a lot of money and there's people that have next to nothing. But it competes with the space that people consider the public space.[214]

The corporate monopolization of public space inspires him to create more work on the street.[215]

Twist's character "the everyman" is a reoccurring caricature that has become synonymous with his name. He contends that the character is "very specific to San Francisco, where there's a huge homeless population that everyone wants to be free of, a bit like graffiti things that the city is trying to get rid of, or pretending doesn't exist. With my work I'm trying to reveal this."[216] Twist's character can be read as an attempt to remind San Francisco residents of the plight of the homeless while simultaneously providing passers-by an alternative to corporate advertizing and the monopolization of space.

McGee's work within the artist gallery scene reveals the cultural expectation within the graffiti scene to remain authentic. Early in his career, Barry had the desire to bring the streets into the art gallery world.[217] Some within the graffiti scene have claimed his gallery work as proof of the artist "selling out." McGee has responded to such criticism by creating more work:

> Whenever I do stuff indoors, I feel like I have to do one hundred and ten percent more outdoors to keep my street credibility. It is probably the audience I am most worried about – the graffiti kids that are really doing stuff. I am always worried about how a twelve or thirteen year old what do they think of what I have done and where do I fit in the scheme of things? 'Oh that guy sold out.'[218]

Ever cognizant of the claims of "selling out," McGee continues to create works on the street and often sprays the slogan "smash the state" on many walls. "I saw that spray-painted around the city quite a bit in the '80s; I just picked up the rock and started throwing it. I hope someone will find that same rock and do the same. Shit is fucked up, everyone can agree on that," he recounts.[219] Always humble, Twist, avoids declaring who is the best graffiti artist and supports "anyone and everyone who has pulled a spray can, marker, or rock from their pocket and used it against the status quo."[220]

Conclusion

During a chilly San Francisco night in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, I walked along Romolo Alley that features a building length mural entitled *Gold Mountain* (1994) created by Ann Sherry. The mural features portraits of Chinese Americans from San Francisco's history and has been the target of vandalism since its creation and was restored in 2004. One image is particularly striking in that the object of defacement is that of a Chinese American policeman (see Figure 3). Such vandalism speaks not only to the tension between legal and illegal street art, but also the ever-present pressure within graffiti culture to retain its authenticity through acts against the establishment even if those acts are directed toward community murals.

Pieces, much like murals, carry political messages and the erasure of such declarations

mark the tenuous relationships between writers. For example, the Revolution Café in San Francisco's Mission District featured a graffiti mural of a number of peoples with fists raised in the air that was created by youth and locally recognized graffiti artist Cuba. The owner of the café commissioned a new mural erasing the political agency of the former in 2010. Within a few days, the new mural was sprayed with the phrase "No Culture Vulture." This led to a meeting between the new and former artists who decided to paint a new mural with help from youth during a summer festival. After much pressure, the new mural, evokes the power of the former, only this time, the Tagalog word, *Katipunan*, is featured retaining its political urgency. A year later, Cuba and other writers constructed a piece in the Mission District's Clarion Alley entitled *Respect the Culture: Over 27 Years of Writing History* that acknowledges the Bay Area's "graf" writers among them Dream, Crayone and Spie (see Figure 4).

The legacy of Mike "Dream" Francisco signifies the influence of Asian American writers of the Bay Area on hip-hop culture's industries. The number of murals and pieces dedicated to Dream in combination with countless events and recordings serve as a reminder of the writer's impact on subsequent generation of hip-hop artists and writers. Although his identity remained underground, his passing ultimately serves as a reminder of his timeless talent and never-ending pursuit of social justice that continues to influence and inspire.

Barry "Twist" McGee's career signifies the influence of Asian American writers of the Bay Area on the graffiti scene. His works – illegal and legal – represent the contradictory expectations within graffiti culture to become famous but also remain credible and authentic. Twist's fame and notoriety, however, continues to influence and inspire those who are dissatisfied with the status quo.

Chapter Five: Dancing with Swagger: Asian American Dance Crews

> *I'm on the schoolyard with my classmates standing in a circle. Laughter, 'oh's,' and 'aws' fill the air as we watch two dancers compete against each other. The mere point of a finger, however, quickly stifles one's laughter and represents a challenge to an onlooker and a new competition begins. This friendly competition is known as breakdancing.*
>
> Break dancing is a style of competitive, acrobatic, and pantomimic dancing. It began as a kind of game, a friendly contest in which black and Hispanic teenagers outdid one another with outrageous physical contortions, spins, and back flips, wedded to a fluid, syncopated, circling body rock done close to the ground. Breaking once meant only dancing on the floor, but now its definition has widened to include electric boogie, up-rock, aerial gymnastics, and all sorts of other fancy variations.[221]

My initial entré into hip-hop culture was breakdancing. Since breaking was the first form of hip-hop culture wholeheartedly embraced by the media, its influence was undeniable. I recall seeing *Breakin'* (1984) at an Oakland movie theater and remember the film melting in the projector. Moviegoers were displeased; however, nobody foresaw how breaking would fare in the ensuing years: an over-saturation that caused the dance form to return to the hip-hop underground to undergo innovations.[222]

Asian American breakers formed collectives or crews to hone their craft. Banes (2004) writes,

> The b-boys organized themselves according to neighborhood or family ties into crews, which were networks for socializing, writing graffiti, and rapping, as well as dancing, held together by a strict code of ethics and loyalty. Crews performed in a spirit of friendly competition at jams where the crew leader directed the group's moves.[223]

As crews, Asian American breakers of the Bay Area performed within multiracial or predominately Asian American collectives in talent shows, cultural events, and/or on the street. For example, while attending a Pilipino Culture Night (PCN) at UC Davis (2005), I witnessed a crew of sixteen dancers perform a hip-hop dance routine that proved to be "a PCN favorite."[224] Indeed, breaking has become so common that audiences expect to see hip-hop dance routines performed at many PCNs. Such expectations suggest that breaking has become a strikingly Filipino American phenomenon and this is evident in the many crews that perform on dance show competitions on television.

Past seasons of MTV's *America's Best Dance Crew* featured a number of dancers of Asian Pacific Islander descent: the JabbaWockeez, Kaba Modern, SuperCr3w, Quest Crew, and Poreotix all of which utilized hip-hop and R&B to wide acclaim. These crews competed in high school and/or college talent shows before they were propelled into the limelight via the fiercely competitive world of reality television.[225]

Their dominance, however, has been met with scrutiny largely due to attitudes regarding Asian American dancers as inextricably tied to the past. Wong (2010) writes,

> The perception of Asians as remnants of a past civilization constructs the Asian body through the past. This is not merely a way of thinking that the body

> produces memory and history, but that the Asian body *is* historical rather than contemporary.[226]

Asian American dance crews, however, utilize hip-hop and R&B to contest such attitudes that restrict them from contributing to American national culture.

This chapter investigates the historical lineage of Asian American dance in hip-hop dance. First, I will historicize Asian American dance through the investigation of nightclubs and dance to provide foundation for the subsequent rise of Asian American dance crews influenced by African American music. Second, I will explore the recollections of Asian American breakdancers. Lastly, I will analyze the JabbaWockeez' utilization of masks and the impact on their ethnic identities.

Historicizing Asian American Dance

"Wing Lee's Ragtime Clock" (1899) is an example of sheet music from the Tin Pan Alley era (1890-1930) that provides commentary on how blacks and Chinese figured into the American imaginary. The lyrics reveal that Wing Lee, a laundry shop owner, dislikes ragtime music as indicated by the phrase "no likee." However, when the clock plays a ragtime tune it attracts "coons" into his laundry shop and he cannot convince them to leave. The song is significant because it is an example of sheet music which features negative portrayals of blacks and Chinese within the same song. The song inspires the further investigation of the obstacles faced by both African Americans and Asian Americans during late 19th century America.

Asian American performers were rare during the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to the predominance of Orientalist attitudes that manifested in a number of staged performances by non-Asians.[227] Yoshihara (2003) describes this as a form of "popular Orientalism" which

manifested in both lowbrow and highbrow theaters.[228] Tchen (1999) argues that this form of Orientalism had a commercial marketplace "that catered to consumers who would buy only certain products and representations about Chinese things, people, and ideas."[229] European Americans portraying Asians on the stage and later film – a phenomena described as Yellowface – became commonplace throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[230] These obstacles led many Asian Americans to perform in musical venues in which jazz and swing featured prominently – genres with African American roots. In this section, I will explore the historical intersections between Asian Americans and African Americans in dance throughout the twentieth century by investigating jazz and swing clubs and the subsequent Asian popular cultural influences of breakdancing.

In the early twentieth century, Asian Pacific Islander men frequented nightclubs that played jazz and swing and such venues provided an outlet for them to express their masculinity. Within these venues, they were seen as a threat to white women and racial purity during the time of anti-miscegenation laws.[231] On the east coast, Asians attending New York dance clubs were cast in a similar light as Filipinos in California since the press portrayed Asian "masculinity as simultaneously threatening *and* thrilling."[232] The aforementioned clubs often led to sensational media coverage since such venues disrupted popular views of segregation during the times restricted immigration, land ownership, citizenship, and anti-miscegenation laws. The hip-hop group the Black Eyed Peas has portrayed the socio-historical reality of the period. Their music video *Bebot* (2006) is a portrayal of Filipino migrant workers in Stockton, California and features a predominately Pinoy (male) crowd performing music and dance led by half-Filipino American emcee Apl.de.ap.[233] While the inclusion of many Pinays (women) within the video

may take liberties with the historical and social reality of the period, the opening of sequence of the signage reading "Absolutely No Filipinos Allowed" and the decision to include a number of white women attempts to provide an accurate portrayal of the experiences of Manongs (older brothers) in taxi dance halls.

During the 1930s and 1940s Chinese Americans in San Francisco, Chinatown later capitalized on such sensational behaviors epitomized by the popular nightclub Forbidden City. The nightclub attracted audiences to experience risqué song and dance routines performed by Chinese Americans. Tajima-Peña (2009) notes that the nightclub was an "all-Chinese revue of singers, dancers, and jokesters" and they venue catered to Orientalist expectations of the times resulting in performances featuring bellydancing, Chinoiserie, harem masters and Little Egypt.[234] Like, the African American Cotton Club on the East Coast, Forbidden City gained an international reputation for its performances.[235]

With the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and subsequent liberalization of immigration laws in the 1960s came a period of integration of Asian Pacific Islanders, many of whom found meaning within black popular music and resistance. Tommy Chong, for instance, was a session player for Motown. In addition, Joe Bataan, a Filipino and African American singer and owner of the Salsoul label, released a number of recognized releases throughout the early 1970s. Furthermore, the Black Power Movement inspired cross-cultural influences that led many Asian Americans to adopt fashions and hairstyles worn by black activists. My aunt, for instance, had a tight afro perm inspired by Black Panther Party member Angela Davis.

Likewise, Asian popular culture, specifically martial arts films, influenced the black dance form breakdancing in the late 1970s. Many scholars note the key role kung-fu films and Bruce Lee had on breakdancing that suggests a lineage of Asian cultural influence within the

dance form.[236] Pabon (2004) notes that there was a hip-hop dance form in San Francisco called the "Chinese Strut" and such a dance form may have been influenced by the high concentration of Asian Pacific Islanders living in the Bay Area and the popularity of martial arts films.[237]

The cross-cultural influences between Asian Americans and African Americans later manifested in contemporary dance shows. For example, Hella Hung, a contestant of the sixth season of *So You Think You Can Dance* (2010), utilized martial arts stereotypes for his audition. However, what is striking is Hung's use of black language, break dance, and an aggressive sexuality. Allowed a humorous intro, Hella Hung speaks out of sync mimicking dubbed kung fu films. This is furthered by the use of gong and water ripple sound effects. These oft-utilized motifs are shattered when he says, "you better bring it son." Such an appropriation of black language implies the cross-cultural influences of martial arts and blaxploitation cinema in the 1970s; however, in this case the influence is reversed (black influencing Asian).[238] This is furthered by Hung's hyper-masculinity indicative of his comedic romancing of the show's host Cat Deely. His over-sexed persona can be read as an appropriation of black masculinity.[239] Thus, Hella Hung's sexual advances toward Deely, although comedic, can be read as an attempt to masculinize Asian American males through the appropriation of black sexuality. Failure to impress the judges with his unsatisfactory but humorous display of breakdancing skills, however, overshadowed his masculinity.

Asian American masculinity came to the forefront of the eighth season of *So You Think You Can Dance* (2011) with finalists Tadd and Marko. Both dancers excelled in a variety of dance routines in which hip-hop featured prominently. Tadd, a crowd favorite, entered the competition as a "self taught breaker" who quickly learned other dance routines.[240] Marko, who

migrated from Guam to Los Angeles, also excelled in a variety of dance forms. Even though the two were part of the final four, they were both eliminated.

The historical intersections between African and Asian Americans in dance warrants further investigation. Filipino and Asian men equally sought solace from a society that cast their masculinity as a threat and these men exercised their masculinity in black venues. With the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and the subsequent liberalization of immigration laws, many people of Asian Pacific Islander descent continued to find meaning within black music. The influence of martial arts films on breakdancing, however, indicates a reciprocal cultural exchange between Asians and African Americans. Such an exchange manifests in the performances by Asian American breakers performing on popular dance show competitions.

Breakin' Memories

A number of interviewees shared recollections of breakdancing as youth growing up in California. This is largely due to the mainstreaming of hip-hop dance through the films *Flashdance* (1983), *Beat Street* (1984), and *Breakin'* (1984). These films resultantly influenced many youth to either be "a breaker, a DJ, or a graffiti artist" according to one participant.[241] Like their DJ and graffiti artist counterparts, breakers formed collectives or crews. These crews "performed in a spirit of friendly competition" and offered an alternative to violence.[242] The following experiences highlight the influence of hip-hop culture and its impact on Asian Americans by providing insight into the proliferation of contemporary Asian American dance crews.

Many interviewees recalled choosing breaking because of their lack of capital restricted them from becoming DJs or graffiti artists. One participant recalled becoming a breaker

because, "it was free" and he simply had to "walk down the hill to Serramonte Mall to practice."[243] Many Filipino American breakers congregated in public areas such as the mall, the War Memorial, and/or the gym, since these areas did not require a fee to practice. One participant recalled his experience breaking at the mall:

> You would walk with a bunch a people in the mall. If you were going to challenge someone, what you ended up doing since you could not do it in the mall was take your cardboard and tell them, 'We are going to meet at such and such place.' It would be some[place] where everyone would lie out the cardboard and duct tape and lay out the boomboxes and go at it.[244]

The inexpensive materials allowed people to practice virtually anywhere. One participant recalled breaking in her kitchen with her cousins:

> I remember we would cut up the cardboard and then we would lay it out on the linoleum floor in the kitchen and [my cousins] would just be breaking. Two older [male] cousins would get all the neighborhood kids to collect cardboard and would break. I actually learned how to break! It was cool. I think I was five or six. I was pretty young. They were twelve or thirteen [at the time].[245]

Filipinos interviewed noted that the familial aspect of breaking allowed participants to incorporate hip-hop dance within their family events such as weddings and baptisms. Like, DJ-ing, breaking featured prominently among many family functions and co-existed alongside Filipino traditional dances such as candle dancing and *Tinikling*.

As breaking became popular, many participants recalled the local news covering the scene and as a result, many became famous. One participant recalled the local news coming to the War Memorial to report on the breaking craze. He recalled Apollo, a future DJ of Invisibl

Skratch Piklz, being interviewed by the news and such coverage was akin to seeing "one's friends and neighborhood in a movie."[246] Another interviewee recalled feeling a sense of pride that his peer, Boogaloo Shrimp, became a celebrity by appearing in the film *Breakin'*. He recalled being surprised to see the famous breaker attend his high school dances to perform and noted "stardom did not affect the breaker's ego."[247]

The immersion in hip-hop dance ultimately surfaced and figured prominently in Asian American talent shows and cultural events such as Fiesta Islands, Fiesta Filipino, and college cultural nights such as Pilipino Cultural Night. Such events were instrumental in preparing Asian American dance crews to compete on nationally televised competitions such as *America's Best Dance Crew*.

Behind the Mask: the JabbaWockeez and Asian American Dance Crews

Asian Americans have featured prominently in dance shows, however, as solo dancers few make the final cut. Those that are granted media exposure tend to fit a number of concocted categories: emasculated males, cute females, and laughable anomalies. Asian American dancers organizing collectively as crews favor a better chance at winning competitions than they do if they compete individually. The proliferation of Asian American hip-hop dance collectives ultimately found mainstream acceptance on Randy Jackson's *America's Best Dance Crew* in 2008 and featured two Asian American dance crews as the finalists: the JabbaWockeez and Kaba Modern.

The winning dance crew, the JabbaWockeez, however, initially muted their ethnic heritages to achieve stardom. Like their DJ and graffiti artists counterparts, the muting of their

ancestries is a strategic decision that redirects attentions to their skills rather than their ethnic backgrounds. The JabbaWockeez utilized masks and gloves throughout their performances similar to how the Invisbl Skratch Piklz utilized mask for their initial releases. Perhaps, JabbaWockeez' self-erasure of their ethnic and racial identities stemmed from the negative publicity given to William Hung's performance as the racial other; an odd physicality combined with a strong accent. Although, Hung capitalized on his otherness and inept singing by releasing *Inspiration* (2004) such attempts reinforced notions of Asian Americans as the foreigner within; a perception deftly avoided by JabbaWockeez. Dancer Gutierrez commented, "[t]he idea of the mask is to remove all ethnic and social barriers when we perform."[248] *Asian Week* columnist Tina Tsai reaffirmed this notion by writing:

> This competition is not about ethnic heritage or race – it's about dancing. Every competitor has shown extreme skill in this department, regardless of heritage. Nonetheless, it's time for Asian Americans to make themselves known in yet another field of arts and entertainment, and break down some of those enslaving model minority walls.[249]

The crew's use of masks, thus, can be read as an attempt to deflect perceptions of the model minority myth that are furthered challenged by their mastery of hip-hop dance. Their performance challenged popular viewpoints of Asians in America studying violin, piano and other classical instruments through the utilization of hip-hop and R&B – genres that are usually equated with a raw urban feel carrying dangerous connotations.[250] As a result, Asian Americans hip-hop dancers contest notions of model minority being "properly behaved" by performing hip-hop dance that is considered to be rawer than its classical counterparts.[251]

The success of the JabbaWockeez challenged parental pressures to succeed in traditional career paths. Dancer Chris Gatdula notes the restrictiveness he and his peers faced from their parents:

> A lot of our parents expected us to get a college degree, make $50K, get a traditional career, like become a doctor, a nurse, an engineer. But young Asian Americans like us look at the world differently. Dancing, once viewed as a past-time activity, is actually an artistic form of expression and is a career.[252]

The dancer's insight highlights the generational divide between parents and their offspring oftentimes manifesting in conflict over career choices that are deemed non-traditional. Despite this conflict, however, the dancers continue the ethnic traditions of their parents by maintaining their language. Manager Audie Vergara argued, "The fact that the guys still speak their ethnic languages is a testament that they haven't lost their heritage."[253]

After winning the competition, the JabbaWockeez' identities came to the forefront as revealed by the *Asian Week* article "Behind the Mask: The JabbaWockeez, America's Best Dance Crew" (2008). The article reveals the crew's strong Asian American fan-base indicative of the tight knit networks within hip-hop collectives as indicated by an event hosted by the Fingerbangerz, a multiracial DJ crew featuring Asian American members. Thus, JabbaWockeez and their Asian American dance crew counterparts benefit from having a unified pan-Asian or multicultural membership – hidden or "unmasked" within the larger hip-hop collective.

Conclusion

I'm waiting for the cable car on Powell and Market Streets in San Francisco as a multiracial crew of breakers tape cardboard onto the concrete. Soon music from their boombox fills the air and gets the attention of tourists. Soon applause erupts from the crowd and the breakers pass around a hat asking for donations. Such events were commonplace when breaking returned to the underground; however, now with the success of *America's Best Dance Crew* and *So You Think You Can Dance* it appears as if breaking has returned into the national spotlight. Indeed, the JabbaWockeez' residence at Las Vegas (2011) speaks to America's fascination with breaking.

After the triumph of the JabbaWockeez, subsequent dance crews featuring Filipino American dancers utilized their ethnicity for marketing purposes. Subsequent winners – We Are Heroes and Poreotix – toured nationally specifically where large populations of Filipino Americans reside. One such event displaying their allegiance to maintaining Filipino American culture is the annual *Kababayan Fest*. What distinguishes *Kababayan* from other Filipino festivals in the United States is the emphasis of the Filipino American experience. *Kababayan* features a variety of artists which reflect mainstream Filipino American tastes (including hip-hop and R&B) rather than cultural traditional dances from the Philippines.

Hip-hop dance, however, is performed alongside traditional dances at many PCNs and signals the influence hip-hop culture has on Filipino American college students. The program for *Finding History Revealing Echoes* (2005), for example, features three silhouettes of Filipinos – two women and one man. Within each silhouette are flags of the Philippines and/or the US that signify their nationalities. What is striking, however, is the inclusion of a spray paint can, boombox, and textbooks within the figure that stands defiant in the foreground.

The success of Asian American dance crews opened the door for future opportunities that capitalized on their stardom. Just as the JabbaWockeez enjoyed multiple media opportunities,

Poreotix' popularity landed a music video appearance with one of music's top teen stars – Justin Bieber. The music video for *Somebody to Love* (2010) features Poreotix dancing in the background. On the surface, the dance crew's performance comes off as a backdrop behind the dominant black (Usher) and white (Bieber) binary. Their inclusion, however, demonstrates the competitiveness and quality of Asian American dance crews.

The history of Asian American dance, however, has explicit ties to the larger African American experience. The experiences of Asian American men within jazz and swing clubs – two genres with African American roots – highlight the influence of black music on Asian Americans seeking enjoyment in the face of discrimination and racism. Likewise, the popularity of martial arts cinema subsequently influenced the popular late twentieth century black dance form breakdancing. A comment by Twitch, a dancer of *So You Think You Can Dance*, about fellow contestant Alex Wong speaks to this cross-cultural exchange. Twitch commented that Wong had "swagger."

The experiences of interviewees speak to the influence of hip-hop culture on Asian American youth. Their decisions to "break" were largely influenced by the lack of capital and learned from popular hip-hop films of the period. Soon this style of dancing was incorporated in Filipino American family gatherings and subsequently found its place in high school talent shows and/or college cultural nights.

Chapter Six: Repping the Bay: Asian American Emcees and Hip-Hop Authenticity

> Hip hop's uses of 'real' and 'true' versus 'fake' and 'phony' frame hip hop as a culture and industry in which artists struggle to maintain an authenticity of self, community, and culture, while still producing a commercial music.[254]

The commercial viability of Asian American hip-hop artists limits their crossover appeal and designates them to the hip-hop underground. The cultural expectation to remain authentic is pervasive throughout the underground's anti-establishment and anti-corporate stances. In turn, Asian American hip-hop artists of the Bay Area epitomize "real" hip-hop by producing, recording, and distributing their own releases. For example, I recall sitting in the driver's seat of my friend's pickup truck as we drove onto Highway 101 towards San Francisco. Sounds of her husband's release *The Summer Exposure Mixtape* (2007) filled the truck and she identified the artist as being Kiwi. She shared stories of selling her husband's releases – both solo and as a part of Native Guns – at community events and to local Filipino American organizations and Asian American Studies classes. Her distribution of Kiwi's releases speaks to the lengths many unsigned Asian American hip-hop artists of the Bay Area will go to sell their releases by accessing the larger Asian American community through its tight-knit network.

Asian American emcees of the Bay Area possess a keen knowledge of hip-hop culture and its cultural expectation to remain authentic. For example, Jona Chung of Cuttynclean Records states,

> Underground, you're really just doing it because that's what you like doing. That's what your passion is. Mainstream, is kind of like, just looking for this

> image. They are looking for this character that is huge. They are looking for this person that will be manipulated and used. And put their picture everywhere, blow it up, and make money, then drop them, if they don't make money.[255]

His insights clearly demarcate what is "real" and what is "fake" within hip-hop culture. In this case, being underground is driven by a "passion" for hip-hop culture, not the desire to make money. Skitz the Samurida echoes Chung's view by arguing "an underground artist is not making this for a profit. They might break even or they might make a little something."[256] Furthermore, Equipto argues that emcees must show respect for hip-hop culture by learning its history in order to be authentic.[257]

Hip-hop authenticity influences the credibility of Asian American hip-hop artists of the Bay Area. By analyzing a number of songs and videos by Asian American emcees who perform within the underground scene, the Hyphy Movement, and conscious hip-hop circles, I will reveal how these artists fulfill the expectations to remain authentic in the following ways: first by investigating how Bay Area pride manifests in their releases; second by investigating how ethnicity manifests in the lyrics of underground emcees of Japanese ancestry; third by revealing how emcees utilize Bay Area slang; and finally how the lyrics of emcees highlight various levels of consciousness that resonates with their culturally-activated audiences. In so doing, I hope to highlight the difficulties of establishing a singular Asian American hip-hop aesthetic.

"Down For Our City:" Authenticity in Bay Area Hip-Hop

After eating at a Filipino restaurant in San Bruno, my friend and colleague offers me a ride back into San Francisco. As we cruise onto the Highway 101 on ramp, the opening bass drums of E-

40's "Tell Me When To Go" (2006) rattles the interior of the pickup truck. This soon leads to a debate on the mainstreaming of the Hyphy Movement. We enter into a debate on the hyphy scene – whether it is the cultural byproduct of the Bay Area's burgeoning medical marijuana and ecstasy scenes or whether it is simply a manifestation of Bay Area pride. She insisted on the later and the defense of her argument was intense. Indeed, many hip-hop artists from the Bay Area claim their hometown, zip code, and/or counties as an act of pride.

Asian American hip-hop artists continue the tradition of reflecting one's pride in their localities by referencing their cities in song and/or video that cultivates credibility from their fan-base. By analyzing the videos of Mistah Roger, Bored Stiff, EyeASage, and Mint Rock, this section reveals how Bay Area pride manifests differently in their releases. This pride is evident throughout videos in which emcees embrace sports teams, defend their cities through violent means, and/or reference the Bay Area's many neighborhoods and districts.

Mistah Roger's *Down For Our City* (2011) showcases Bay Area pride through an embracement of Bay Area sports teams. The video features the emcee rapping with Vudoo (of the Gookstaz), Loc V, and Too Sicc about East Oakland and San Jose. Each emcee wears sports apparel: the Raiders, Oakland Athletics, and San Francisco Giants to reflect Bay Area pride. Emcee Too Sicc starts the song by declaring, "from Oakland to San Jose what's hap'nin" while standing in the upper deck seats of the Oakland Coliseum. Subsequent footage of the HP Pavillon signifies San Jose's alliance with Oakland. Emcee Loc V's line "it's the city of the Sharks and Giants" continues the sports theme of the song. The end of the emcee's verse – "we're real quick to spark the violence" – however, takes the song in a violent direction.

Bay Area pride manifests in violent imagery throughout *Down For Our City* – violence that the emcees reflect from their high crime environments of East Oakland and San Jose. After

Loc V's verse, South East Asian youth wearing shades, hats and bandanas to conceal their identities point pistols at the camera. This culminates in a scene in which an anonymous youth points an AK-47 at the camera. Such a display of violence to defend their city grants an unquestionable realness to the emcees that is heightened by a close up on an empty gun shell casing. Furthermore, the song's chorus reinforces the video's violent theme:

> We got real ninjas all around,
>
> Soon as you step in town,
>
> Oakland, California is where it rolls down,
>
> We hold it down for our city,
>
> We got real ninjas from San Jose,
>
> And yeah, they all riders,
>
> The 408 is down with Oakland,
>
> Nothing but raw fighters.

"Real ninjas" is a racialized slang term for Asian youth who are "riders" and "raw fighters" – descriptors that are reinforced by gun imagery. "The 408" is San Jose's area code and the city is "down" with Oakland – "down" being the term to describe the city's alliance and allegiance. Footage of Oakland's police officers clearly state who the enemy is – the police. Images of East Oakland streets (i.e., International Boulevard and the intersection of Foothill and ^{23rd}) follow the song's chorus and emcee Vudoo announces "East Oakland, I got this baby. Free Tanibal" – a declaration of his East Oakland pride and a pledge of allegiance to one of the Gookstaz's jailed emcees. Vudoo's verse continues the song's violent theme:

> I put it down for my city,
>
> East Oakland to the graveyard,

Come where I come bitch,

You gotta have a brave heart,

Never would I run,

No pussy aw hell nah,

I gotta a chopper that would knock your fucking head off.

A "chopper" is an automatic rifle, in this case an AK-47, which is mimicked by the emcee as he aims an imaginary rifle at the camera as he raps his verse.

Violence is also reflected by emcees describing the Bay Area's low-income neighborhoods and the Bay Area's infamous history. *The Game Go* (2011) features a multiracial crew of emcee's rapping in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. Mint Rock stands on the corner of Hyde and Eddy and raps:

The Bay Area,

Is more like hysteria,

Dope fiends will take care ya,

And bury ya,

The more the merrier,

Killer like Jim Jones,

On a crusade,

Serving up some Kool Aid.

"Dope fiends" are a common sight in the Tenderloin District where drug dealers sell crack and heroin. The emcee critiques the deceptive allure of San Francisco's hippy culture by referencing

reverend Jim Jones (1931-1978) who was responsible for the death of many of his followers – many of whom were from the Bay Area.

Bay Area pride also manifests in the videos of emcees that show an affinity for its neighborhoods. Bored Stiff's *Media* (2007), for example, features the multiracial crew throughout San Francisco's many neighborhoods. The video begins with the camera lens in outer space zooming into the Bay Area and landing on the corner of 18th and Mission at the Smoke City cigarette shop. Inside the shop, Japanese-Columbian American emcee Equipto asks for two "swishers" (cigars) as his phone chimes the tune of deceased Vallejo rapper Mac Dre's "Feelin Myself" (2006). He answers a call to come into the studio as images of San Francisco's vibrant graffiti scene fills the screen. This is followed by the emcee waiting for a MUNI streetcar. The route of the streetcar is shown on a map that is cleverly edited to reflect the emcee's destination – a motif that is repeated by each emcee's verse. Emcee Mic follows Equipto's verse by rapping, "so fuck the media, remember you don't have to wear a Yankee hat for hip-hop to believe in ya" while placing a San Francisco Giants baseball cap on his daughter's head. The verse indicates a raw pride that is less reliant on hip-hop's birthplace, New York, and more so upon its homegrown Bay Area talent.

Bay Area pride also surfaces in EyeASage's "Heart of the City" (2008). The Filipina emcee begins the short rap from her mixtape *Married to the Hustle* (2008) by giving shout outs to various San Francisco neighborhood's: Excelsior, SOMA, and the Mission District – neighborhoods with high concentrations of Filipino Americans. She continues by rapping about seeing graffiti while waiting for the 18 MUNI bus and "learning her game" in Potrero Hill. This is followed by playing with friends in "Hunters Point, Lakeview, Sunnydale, (and) Fillmore."

The song's chorus features a sample of Bobby "Blue" Bland's "Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City" (1974) over which the emcee raps:

Ain't no love in the city,

It ain't pretty,

Ain't no love in the town,

We're still around though.

EyeASage also defends her city pride with imagery found within her mixtape. For example, the emcee is featured smiling wearing make up, tank top and jewelry while holding a M-16.

Asian American emcees also reveal their Bay Area pride by acknowledging the neighborhoods they grew up in and detailing the obstacles they faced. Mint Rock's video *Growing Up Poor* (2010), for example, features the emcee rapping about growing up in the low-income neighborhood of San Francisco's Fillmore District:

Growing up didn't have enough,

Five older brothers fighting over stuff,

It was all tough even though it was love,

Didn't have nobody, just us, but us,

Lend me some money,

I'm gonna pay you back,

Let me sport that shirt,

I need something black,

My HP partners showed me how to roll craps,

Now I'm soaking up game from the Mac,

Back in Fillmore,

Lower Haight to be exact,

You can find me there,

Prevalent like crack.

The lyrics describe the situation many low-income youth of the Bay Area face – a lack of material items that leads to altercations, the borrowing of items and money, and ultimately gambling. The "HP" is short for Hunters Point – a predominately black low-income neighborhood of San Francisco. Both the "HP" and Mint Rock's neighborhood of the Lower Haight in the Fillmore District are areas of which low-income housing and drug dealing features prominently.

Asian American emcees display a pride for the Bay Area that disrupts notions of Asians being perpetual foreigners.[258] The videos of each emcee and crew root Asian American emcees as Bay Area natives. Their embrace of Bay Area sports teams, neighborhoods, and districts showcase a pride for the Bay Area that is sometimes defended through violent imagery. The violence of Mistah Roger's *Down For Our City*, for example, displaces notions Asian American passivity through a hyper-masculine guise that simultaneously challenges the model minority myth. By reflecting the harsh reality of life in the low-income neighborhoods of Oakland and San Francisco, Asian American emcees offer an alternative view to the widely held belief of Asian American's being a "problem-free" minority.

The Independents: A Peak Into the Bay Area Underground Scene

How you livin'? I say, "sucka free." – Bored Stiff

We've always been together on this independent hustle. – Nump[259]

> We're gonna have to start our own shit and blow-up independently because no artists-&-repertoire is gonna say 'we need to go out there and find ourselves some Asian rappers.' – Lyrics Born[260]

I'm dancing with my friends amongst a crew of backpackers – khaki, hooded sweatshirt, cap or beanie, and backpack wearing underground hip-hop fans – at the Maritime Hall catching a show by the Bay Area hip-hop collective the Living Legends. We bounce in unison to the chorus of "Nowuno" (1997):

> Freely in a standstill,
> Patience wearing thin,
> So we wait, but we don't,
> So we ain't slow rollin' through the Yay,
> As we raise fine art through this origin hip-hop.

The lyrics express the independent ethos that characterizes many Bay Area ("the Yay") hip-hop releases. Emcee Sunspot Jonz raps:

> Half those arrogant DJs got our shit but don't play it,
> Leavin' underground and emcees feelin' mad and a little underrated,
> I hated givin' a DJ my shit,
> But he wanna ride the East Coast dick.

The Living Legends label, Revenge Entertainment, declared war on the commercial hip-hop through their sharp commentaries on radio stations and their DJs preference for East Coast hip-

hop. The Living Legends defense of the underground hip-hop scene, however, extends far beyond the confines of the Bay Area.

At the same concert, I stopped dancing as Arata, an emcee from Japan, took his turn at the mic to rap entire verses in Japanese. I was not the only one in attendance whose jaw dropped to the floor during Arata's delivery. Soon a thunderous applause arose from the audience while emcee Sunspot Jonz announced to the crowd, "this is hip-hop worldwide!" Much later Arata released *The Way I Live* (2005) on the Living Legends label Legendary Music. The album is significant since the entire album is rapped in Japanese. The inclusion of Arata within the Living Legends fold speaks to the welcoming environment of the Bay Area underground hip-hop scene.

Japanese American hip-hop emcees feature prominently throughout this section to reveal how their ethnicity and/or nationality manifests throughout their releases. By investigating songs and videos by Shing02, the SCOJourners crew, and Equipto this section will reveal how Japanese American emcees support each other's efforts. In addition, I will reveal how the aforementioned artists network with other Bay Area hip-hop crews and artists to highlight the supportive network of the underground scene. Finally, I will show how the tight-knit underground scene reflects the multiracial composition of the Bay Area.

Shing02 is a Japanese American emcee and producer whose career speaks to the transient nature of the Bay Area hip-hop scene. Shing02 was born in Tokyo, Japan and raised abroad in England, Tanzania, until later moving to California. While at school in Berkeley in the early 1990s, Shing02 found himself immersed in the local hip-hop scene and soon began to produce his own releases including *Laid in Japan* (1998), *Pearl Harbor EP* (1999) in addition to collaborating with emcees Murs of Living Legends, EL-P of Company Flow, and Yeshua Dapoed on the twelve inch single "A Day Like Any Other" (1998).

Shing02's lyrics rapped in English and/or Japanese question U.S. imperialism and such topics regulate his releases to the hip-hop underground. His song "Pearl Harbor" (1998) feature's emcee Bas-1 who interrogates the slogan "Never Forget" by juxtaposing the dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima to Pearl Harbor: "the creation of the atom bomb who the fuck to drop it on? Japan, the only non-European." Shing02 follows Bas-1's verse by rapping a verse through the eyes of a kamikaze pilot:

I'm a lone pilot,

Equipped with the Zero,

In my mother land,

They honor me as a hero…

And yes, I do remember the 7th day of December,

Being patriotic in an idiotic war,

Now what the hell was I fighting for!?

Shing02 morphs from a Kamikaze pilot into an emcee:

1998,

Japanese emcee engaging in battle,

Perfect composure,

Forget the path of overnight sensation,

The final destination, world conquer…

I think globally and rap locally,

The freak Asian breaking down the equation,

E=MC squared?

Nah, me equal emcees scared because I explode atomically,

> Emcee's break down comically get dropped automatically,
>
> The force connecting the pacific is called hip-hop,
>
> One nation indivisible in an invisible war,
>
> Now what the fuck are you fighting for!?

The emcee's juxtaposition of Pearl Harbor to battles within hip-hop culture speaks to the futility of all wars. The lyrics, however, emphasize Shing02's Japanese ancestry and race (Asian). He cleverly turns the model minority trope of the math wizard ("E=MC squared") on its head by excelling as an emcee. Furthermore, the lyric's emphasis of "forget[ing] the path of overnight sensation" reinforces the emcees independent stance by discrediting hip-hop trends. Shing02 embodies independent hip-hop since he has never had a contract with an American label. Instead, he released albums through the Japanese independent label Mary Joy Recordings. As a result, his fan-base is limited to those who can afford hip-hop imports.

ScoJourners are a Japanese American hip-hop crew from San Francisco. Their name is a twist on the term "sojourners" that describes those of Asian ancestry who migrated to the States with the intention of returning to their home country.[261] Skitz the Samurida shares how they came up with the crew's name:

> In 2004 we took our first trip out to Japan. All of us just on our own. We made a few contacts on that trip. We come back to the States, and all the sudden I get a phone call. A promoter out there [Japan] wants us to get out their quick. So we all hop on a flight to Japan and get out there. And still at that time we were all independent artists. We hadn't formed the group ScoJourners, but we were in Japan. Estairy had *Hybrid* (2003) out, Curt Sak had *Go 4 Broke* (2003), so we

were in Japan in late 2004 and we decided 'let's form a group.' Curt Sak came up with the name ScoJourners.[262]

Max continues, "All of our ancestors who came to North America – they were basically sojourners just like how we came east to west, you know, we are coming from the west to branch out to all over the world. Soujourners from the SCO (San Francisco)."[263]

The ScoJourners' video for *Independent Hustle* (2008) documents the crew selling their releases on the streets the Upper Haight District of San Francisco. In one scene, Skitz is filmed entering Amoeba Records with a box of CDs and later exiting without them suggesting that he sold them at the store.[264] African American singer Mike Marshall sings the song's chorus:

You don't know me,
This life I live ain't easy,
I've been working these streets…
And I'm all around the world selling these CDs.

The video's cameos from Equipto, Mint Rock, and the rest of the Bored Stiff crew not only asserts the ScoJourners' independent spirit but also speaks to the supportive characteristic of the Bay Area hip-hop underground network.

Equipto is a Japanese-Columbian emcee of the Bored Stiff crew – an independent hip-hop collective from San Francisco that was formed in 1992. The group founded its own record label Hella Records in 1995 before establishing Bored Stiff Entertainment in 2008. Equipto currently releases recordings on his label Solidarity Records – "The Peoples Label." Equipto and his fellow emcees of the Bored Stiff crew often employ the term "Sucka Free" to distance themselves from mainstream hip-hop's mediocrity by remaining independent. Equipto's "Hip-Hop Iz" (2004) describes the "cutthroat" climate of the hip-hop industry:

Hip-Hop is,

A gigantic market,

Control your fan-base,

And know who to target,

Doing it worldwide,

But I ain't no star yet,

I'm in the record store still trying to bargain,

Play the game starving,

But pay my rhymes,

Buy the CDs,

I don't fuck with consignment,

To all you rap cats trying to get major,

Save your paper,

Pray for a savior.

The lyrics describe the situation many independent emcees face: a reluctance for record stores to carry their releases. This is echoed by Equipto's verse at the end of *The Game Go*:

I tried to tell you man,

They want to sell you dreams,

The industry scheme.

This distrust of the hip-hop industry grants the emcee a considerable amount of credibility from Bay Area underground hip-hop artists particularly Andre Nickatina (formerly Dre Dog). Equipto's four albums – *Midnight Machine Gun Rhymes and Alibis* (2002)*, Horns and Halos* (2005), *Gun-Mouth 4 Hire: Horns and Halos 2* (2005) and *Bullet Symphony: Horns and Halos 3*

(2006) – with the black emcee indicates Equipto's appeal amongst Bay Area independent hip-hop fans since their collaborations are held in high regard.

Equipto, however, acknowledges his multiracial and multiethnic upbringing. The emcee acknowledges "Benihana's in Japantown" in "Heart & Soul" (2011) and his Columbian mother in "Woman Of My Life" (2000). His Japanese ancestry may be muted in comparison to the emcees of the ScoJourners and Shing02, however, his collaborations with the aforementioned artists in combination with his frequent cameos with fellow emcee Mint Rock suggests a strong supportive Asian American hip-hop network.

The collaborations between the emcees discussed in this section suggest a strong network between the Bay Area's emcees of Japanese ancestry. For example, the ScoJourners' website promotes Shing02's album *For the Tyme Being* (2009) that features the track "Hero" produced by the ScoJourners. The ScoJourners' self-titled album (2011) also features contributions by Equipto and Shing02. Equipto also appears throughout Estairy's *Hybrid* (2003) and Curt Sak's *Go 4 Broke* (2003). In addition, Filipino American producer Ayeweezy's production and musical contributions to the ScoJourners' debut, Estairy and Skitz' *The Premiere* (2009), Skitz the Samurida's *Control the Mic, Control the Masses* (2004), and Bored Stiff's *The Sad Truth* (2008) and *Timeless* (1996) suggests a larger pan-Asian American network.

A number of collaborations between Asian American emcees and other underground Bay Area hip-hop artists indicate the tight-knit and supportive network of the multiracial scene. For example, the Solidarity Records label compilation *Profound* (2010) features tracks by Equipto, ScoJourners, the Mystick Journeymen and Gas Mask Colony and reflects the multiracial composition of the scene. The liner notes of Mint Rock's eponymous release (2005) includes shout outs to the Living Legends, Bored Stiff, DJs Qbert and Apollo, as well as deceased graffiti

artist Dream and fellow TDK member Spie continues this trend. Contributions by Equipto, Dubee, E-40 and the Federation to Nump's *The Nump Yard* (2005) indicates how the Bay Area's most successful emcees support local talent.

The close-knit underground Bay Area hip-hop scene provides a supportive network that serves as a conduit for the distribution of releases. For example, in the winter of 2010, I attended a party in Daly City. Amongst those in attendance were many Filipinas who distribute and manufacture clothes for Hiero Imperium – the company of Hieroglyphics – an East Oakland hip-hop crew featuring Del Tha Funkee Homosapien, Souls of Mischief and Casual. The women wore hooded sweatshirts emblazoned with the Hieroglyphics logo sold as "Hiero Hoodies." Later that evening, emcee Pac-Man of the Savage Committee handed me his latest release *Hustle4Everything* (2008). The CD, like many of those discussed in this chapter, wears its Bay Area pride on its sleeve through the use of local slang, fashion, and/or lyrical content – all significant qualifiers that build upon an artist's credibility and further a unique Bay Area sensibility.

The underground hip-hop scene of the Bay Area supports local talent many of which are Asian American emcees. The scene's motto of living "sucka free" serves as a day-to-day reminder of the precarious position Asian American emcee's face in the light of commercial hip-hop. Emcees form collectives and collaborate with the larger underground community. Mystik Journeymen's *Broke Assed Summer Jam*, for example, served as an alternative to KMEL's annual *Summer Jam* concert and featured a number of underground crews and emcees among them Equipto. Such events suggest that the underground scene will continue to thrive and excel in opposition to mainstream commercial hip-hop.

Going "Dumb" and Spreading Knowledge: Asian American Hip-Hop Artists and Genres

This section will investigate two hip-hop genres in which Asian Americans participate – the Hyphy Movement and conscious hip-hop – to reveal how each genre erects differing sets of expectations rooted in hip-hop authenticity. By analyzing the videos by emcees of Asian Pacific Islander descent, I will reveal how each artist maintains their hip-hop credibility by fulfilling expectations dictated by the genre in which they perform. In so doing, I show how difficult it is to create a singular Asian American hip-hop aesthetic.

The Hyphy Movement

> In the Bay,
> We Go Hyphy,
> Stupid Dumb,
> Hyphy. – Mistah F.A.B.
>
> Scraper on dubs,
> Going dummy in the club,
> Switching four lanes,
> I'm the boss in the game. – Bailey
>
> I Got Grapes! – Nump

I am about to go to bed in my basement apartment on 7th Street in Oakland, California on the outskirts of Chinatown near Laney College. While tucking myself into bed, I hear the sounds of a number of automobiles with engines revving and tires screeching. People howls are punctuated by beats and rhymes fighting to be heard amongst the madness. Soon, these

"scrapers" (tricked out or embellished GM automobiles) with "dubs" (large chrome mag-wheels) start a rodeo-like affair in the middle of the Laney College parking lot. Soon the revelers "go dumb" or "get stupid" by dancing and yelling as they watch the scrapers do donuts, figure eights, and/or whip around the parking lot. Many onlookers may roll a "bleezy" (a hallowed out cigar filled with marijuana) and/or smoke "grapes" (marijuana). Within minutes police sirens can be heard in the distance and the scrapers quickly leave the parking lot onto 7th street to Highway 880 to evade the patrol cars. This is just another night in Oakland – the sideshow capital of the world and the flagship of the Hyphy Movement.

E-40's "Tell Me When To Go" (2006) brought the Hyphy Movement to national attention and its lyrics reflect Bay Area slang that highlights most hyphy songs. For example, E-40's verse offers insights into Bay Area slang:

> Some Henny,
>
> Some Swishers and Listerine Strips,
>
> Doctor Green Thumb lips,
>
> Just to ease my thoughts.

The aforementioned lyrics are coded words for drinking and marijuana: "Henny" is short for Hennessey, "Swishers" are Swisher Sweets Cigars, "Doctor Green Thumb" is medical marijuana, and "Listerine Strips" are used to cleanse the mouth of alcohol and marijuana. Within this section, I am interested in how Asian American emcees of the Hyphy Movement utilize Bay Area slang that challenges the model minority myth. By investigating videos and songs by the Gookstaz, Nump, and Haji Springer, I will reveal how these artists immersion in the Hyphy Movement roots Asian emcees as Bay Area natives and thereby challenges perceptions of Asians as perpetual foreigners.

Asian American emcees of the Hyphy Movement employ Bay Area drug slang in order to achieve a level of authenticity amongst its fans. *Lovin Dat Taste* (2010), a video by the Gookstaz, opens with a pair of hands in a bag of marijuana. A voice exclaims, "See, that's what real weed looks like because back home that shit looks fucked up. That's a thick bitch right there!" Emcee Vudoo holds a bottle of "Henny" and wears a t-shirt that reads, "Planet of the Grapes." He stands with a gender inclusive crew in front of an SUV emblazoned with Gookstaz stickers parked in the parking lot of the Oakland Coliseum. Singer Nini raps,

> We just wanna get high,
>
> All day so the time pass by,
>
> Back to back,
>
> Twisting up sacks,
>
> The town where we have the best grapes at,
>
> Smoke another blunt to my face,
>
> I'll break her down right now,
>
> Smoke grapes,
>
> And blow out thick like clouds.

The lyrics of the song reflect the high concentration of medical marijuana stores in Oakland – a city now popularly known as Oaksterdam (a combination of Amsterdam and Oakland).[265] The Gookstaz embracement of marijuana not only grants them a certain amount of street credibility but also challenges notions of Asian Americans as model minorities.

Nump's "I Got Grapes" (2005) was the first Bay Area hip-hop song to employ the code word "grapes" for marijuana. The song, featuring E-40 and the Federation, is an ode to "Purple" (a strain of marijuana). Nump raps:

Yeah I'm from the Bay,

Planet of the apes,

Home of the purple kush,

Home of the grapes.

The chorus asks, "who got purple?" and Nump answers screaming, "I got grapes!" The song's popularity reached South Asian emcee M.I.A. who later remixed the song as "Legalize My Medicine" (2009). The remix, produced by E-40's son Droop-E, features the emcee rapping about "Purple Power." She raps the chorus: "down there in my garden, I keep my trees hidden like Bin Laden." Her collaboration with Nump not only suggests the influence of the Hyphy Movement long after the success of E-40's "Tell Me When To Go," but also a larger supportive Asian American network amongst its emcees.

Haji Springer is a Desi emcee whose videos and CDs confront stereotypes of South Asians as model minorities. The self-proclaimed "Indian rapper" who runs "the West" appears on tracks by Bay Area emcees Mistah F.A.B., Keak Da Sneak, and San Quinn. He appears throughout the DVD *Smoke-N-Thizz* (2006) smoking marijuana, showing off his medical marijuana card, and announcing "Yadada" – a variation of "Yadaimean" which is Bay Area slang for the phrase "you know what I'm saying?" The cover of his release entitled *Hurry Up & Buy* (2009) employs the South Asian liquor storeowner trope (i.e., see Apu of *The Simpsons*) and features the emcee behind a shop counter surrounded by products branded as "Haji's." The Haji's brand is clearly marketed towards junk food junkies and/or marijuana smokers who seek "Crunchie Munchies," "Cigarillos," "Cheezy Nibbles," an array of lighters, and/or bottles of liquor.

Haji asserts his identity as a South Asian emcee from the Bay Area as an alternative to the materialist trends pervasive throughout the "Indo Chic" trend. Sandhu (2004) writes that "Indian people" were "blatantly missing from this trend" and Springer's releases signal a reversal of this phenomenon.[266] Haji, however, employs a stereotypical persona as indicated by his use of a think accent in Mac Dre's posthumous DVD release *Treal T.V. #2* (2006). The emcee states, "*Thizz TV* Buddy! I'm Haji Springer – the horse my friend. The terrorist rapper representing for Thizz buddy." He continues by speaking in an Indian dialect that is translated and subtitled into hyphy slang: "For furl is why we stay ballin' out of control and have more cheese than Velveeta. *Treal TV*. Thizz Ent. You Beezy!" "Furl" is the nickname of deceased Vallejo rapper Mac Dre who released albums on "Thizz Ent(ertainment)." "Ballin' out of control" is slang for making a lot of money. Thus, Haji acknowledges the importance of Mac Dre on his own career. "Beezy" is a Bay Area slang word for "bitch" – a word which was popularized by Oakland rapper Too $hort in the 1980s. In combination, the emcee's use of local slang grounds him as an emcee from the Bay Area who makes more "cheese" (money) than "Velveeta."

The death of Mac Dre (1974-2004), the figurehead of the Hyphy Movement, led many fans to wonder if the scene would carry on. Some discredited the movement as being nothing more than a gimmick; however, its influence and longevity seven years after Mac Dre's death proves otherwise. The cultural industries that sprung forth after his death – CDs, DVDs, bobblehead dolls, and masks – in addition to numerous graffiti murals dedicated to the artist serves as a testimony to the longevity of the scene. More importantly, the scene's inclusion of Asian American emcees Haji Springer, Nump and the Gookstaz crew indicates an undeniable Bay Area hip-hop aesthetic that reflects its multiracial and multiethnic composition. For its

Asian American emcees and crews, the Hyphy Movement, serves as an outlet to stake claim to "the Yay" (the Bay Area) by employing the scene's vernacular.

Conscious Hip-Hop

In the early 1990s "gangsta rap" became an exploitable trope within the hip-hop industry. Originating from Southern California, this manufactured genre became widely popular largely due to the success of N.W.A. and its emcees (Ice Cube, Dr. Dre and Eazy E) whose careers paved the way for the careers of Snoop Dog and Warren G.[267] In Oakland, 2Pac, formerly of Digital Underground, symbolized "Thug Life" and resistance by penning insightful lyrics that reflected the environment of the Bay Area's low-income neighborhoods. By the mid-1990s, however, the "gangsta" trope morphed due to the popularity of releases originating from New York that detailed the pursuit of material wealth by any means.[268] This led to a notorious battle for hip-hop supremacy between the West and East Coasts and resulted in the death of two of their respective emcees – 2Pac and Notorious B.I.G.[269]

Beneath the bicoastal rivalry, however, was an emerging underground hip-hop scene that flourished on a national scale. The underground's insightful lyrics relied less on bravado and more on intellect offered an alternative to mainstream hip-hop's obsession with material wealth. On the West Coast this included crews and groups such as the Living Legends, Hieroglyphics, Hobo Junction, Bored Stiff, Dilated Peoples and People Under The Stairs. On the East Coast, this included emcees Mos Def and Talib Kweli, the crew Company Flow and the record labels Fondel 'Em, Rawkus and Wordsound.[270] The assertion of underground hip-hop's independent spirit, however, created a genre – conscious hip-hop – that shunned mainstream hip-hop culture

through the establishment of independent labels. This new trope later morphed into the elitist term "backpacker" to describe college educated underground hip-hop fans.

The ethnicities of Asian American emcees impact their ability to achieve mainstream success and thereby regulate them to the hip-hop underground. Emcees are often looked upon as "cultural ambassadors" that speak on behalf of the larger Asian American community and/or its many ethnicities.[271] This situation influences the artistic direction of many emcees that insert the experiences of Asian Pacific Islanders within their lyrics. For example, "Learn Chinese" (2003) was Jin's attempt to break into the mainstream by rapping in Cantonese and English; however, the single failed to resonate with U.S. audiences despite being signed by the Ruff Ryders.

Asian American emcees rely on college campuses and community organizations across the country to access their culturally-activated fan-base. For example, the successful careers of Denizen Kane, the Pacifics, Blue Scholars, and Native Guns are inextricably tied to performances on college campuses with Asian American student groups. These student groups have linkages to the greater Asian American community based organizations that represent potential venues. In turn, the content of their songs – ethnic pride, identity politics, mobilization, and resistance – reflect the ideals of their fan-base who interprets such offerings as a display of consciousness. Within this section, I will analyze the songs and videos of a number of Asian American hip-hop artists – Curt Sak, Jona Chung, Kiwi, Equipto, and Rocky Rivera – to reveal how consciousness manifests differently in their releases.

Curt Sak, a Japanese American emcee of the ScoJourners, expresses ethnic consciousness throughout his release *Go 4 Broke* (2004). The title of the album is a reference to the 442nd infantry regiment – an all Japanese American regiment that fought in Europe during WWII while

Japanese Americans in the U.S. were incarcerated in internment camps.[272] On the track "West Coast Offense" the emcee praises his family for the sacrifices they've made in order to survive in San Francisco:

> Walking through the streets,
>
> My whole family felt the heat,
>
> Born and raised in the SF City,
>
> Since 1975,
>
> My grandparents since 1935,
>
> Real Frisco souls,
>
> That gave me what I know.

This acknowledgement of sacrifice also extends to the emcee's extended family members. For example, "On The Strength," a collaborative track featuring Equipto, documents the friendship between the emcees of Japanese ancestry. The song starts with Curt Sak praising his "folks":

> Thanks to my folks for taking time out of their lives,
>
> And having the foresight,
>
> To teach us what's real,
>
> Culture and history is how things get ill,
>
> Sometimes we didn't listen though hardheaded lessons,
>
> That keeps me stressing.

The emcee's salutations can be read as a "shout out" to his parents and/or an acknowledgment of the influence of his extended family. The line "culture and history is how things get ill" indicates the transmission of knowledge between his family members (familial or extended) and serve as cautionary tales for the younger generation. Equipto furthers this interpretation by

rapping: "reminiscing of times of innocence, living the life too fast to give a shit." The lyrics suggest the emcees went through formative experiences that changed the direction of their lives. The chorus of "Goin Thru It," rapped by fellow SCOJourner emcee Skitz, continues this trend:

Goin' thru it,

Is the only way to do it,

Each day try to use it for what you are pursuing,

Appreciate the struggle for what it's worth,

Define the true reason why you was put on this Earth.

Thus, Curt Sak's lyrics indicate a raw sense of purpose influenced by knowledge shared through his kin (fictive and familial).

Kiwi's *Imagine* (2008) serves as an exemplary example of conscious hip-hop that acknowledges the Bay Area's diverse populations and social activism. The video features the Filipino American emcee in Oakland's neighborhoods rapping about the possibility of systemic change. The following lines indicates Kiwi's consciousness:

I guess it's bigger than just music,

It's easier for us to sing than just to do it,

I'm trying to flip that and start with me,

And I won't stop until we all are free,

Love peace and harmony for every living creature,

Just imagine if we can make the Earth a little greener,

A place with more schools and no prisons,

What if we took a flame to the whole damn system?

Imagine.

The lyrics root the emcee deep within social activist circles of the Bay Area. Various races, ethnicities, and genders rap Kiwi's lyrics throughout *Imagine*. This is achieved by clever editing techniques that reflect Oakland's diverse population. In addition, women breakers feature prominently throughout the video. The inclusion of murals of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mike "Dream" Francisco (both found in Oakland) grants the emcee a certain amount credibility that fosters a sense of authenticity among his fans. This is furthered by the emcee's use of a sample of a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. on military spending: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is heading towards spiritual doom."

Jona Chung acknowledges the Bay Area's rich history of resistance in his video *What Really Makes You?* (2010). The beginning of the video features images of San Francisco's Tenderloin, Oscar Grant, a sidewalk memorial flanked by a police car, protests at city hall, images of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and fliers calling for the release of the San Francisco Eight – eight jailed BPP members. The video's release came after the jury found Johannes Mehserle guilty of involuntary manslaughter for the shooting of Oscar Grant. Coinciding with this unpopular verdict, a number of fliers requesting the release of the SF8 were posted throughout San Francisco. Jona asserts his independence by declaring mainstream hip-hop as "pure garbage." An alternative reading of the song's title and the opening sequence of images suggest that the song is a call to mobilize the masses during times of civil unrest.

Equipto's "Subliminal" (2010) expresses a consciousness as indicated by the emcee's indictment of the hip-hop industry and the status quo. He shares his evolution as an activist and emcee by rapping:

> I use to blame the white man then I blame the government,

Now I see it's deeper than that – I'm on some other shit.

My mind moves with the hands of time,

Never catch me asking why,

Guess it's time to go to the mothership,

Strategize or you can bow down and compromise,

This is not a lie man – we can really colonize,

Think ahead cuz everything is sink or swim,

See who's your family and who's there through the thick and thin.

The emcee asserts his evolution as an activist by dismissing reactionaries blaming the "white man" and "the government" by creating a network of like-minded individuals through strategic mobilization. This infers that the Bored Stiff collective serves as an alternative support network. Without such a supportive framework Equipto declares emcees will "compromise" and "sink." He continues,

A sign of the times,

Falling the victim,

If you don't fight you are just part of the system,

It's divide and conquer,

The lies and the gossip…

And we lost in this world when we keep on frontin'

But this mic ain't shit unless we speak on somethin'.

The lyrics provide insight into the emcee's consciousness and the power of hip-hop to mobilize the masses. It also speaks to the pressure independent emcees face to remain relevant in the eyes

of their fans. This is achieved by rapping about social issues and an overhaul of the system whether it is within the hip-hop industry or society.

Rocky Rivera, a Filipina emcee, also known as EyeASage, employs an acute awareness of gender roles in the videos *Trick Habit* (2010) and *Girl Like Me* (2011). *Trick Habit* begins with a woman watching her boyfriend play video games while she cooks a pot roast. Enraged by her boyfriend's lack of attention she notices a newspaper advertisement that reads, "Hey Ladies! Need Help With Your Man? Fix Your Man." Rocky Rivera appears animated within the newspaper advertisement and sings the song's chorus:

> Hang up the chick habit,
>
> Hang it up daddy,
>
> Or you'll be alone in a quick.
>
> Hang up the chick habit,
>
> Hang it up daddy,
>
> Or you'll never get another fix.
>
> I'm telling you it's not a trick,
>
> Pay attention,
>
> Don't be thick,
>
> Or you're liable to get licked,
>
> You're gonna see the reason why,
>
> When they are spitting in your eye.

The chorus is a response to men who mistreat women by being unfaithful. "Tricks" in this case refers to men who denigrate women as nothing more than play things who are unaware of their philandering. The emcee, hired by the unhappy woman, spikes a root beer of the video gamer

only to later find himself tortured in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) fashion – he is strapped to a table with his eyes forced open with an apparatus as he watches a screen which reads, "Together, Communication and OBEY." This is followed by the emcee removing her captive's brain with a saw and the following morning, the patient shows up on the customer's doorstep smiling with flowers and a face full of stitches.

Alternatively, Rocky Rivera's *Girl Like Me* employs the emcee's sexuality by presenting her scantily clothed; however, the song's lyrics attack men's perceptions of women:

> So you see her in a video,
>
> Grinding in a mini skirt,
>
> Bragging to your boys about the things,
>
> You want to do to her,
>
> Oh Boy,
>
> You're just a sucker for a dutty wife,
>
> Pulling all the dutty gals,
>
> Thinking we got dutty minds.

"Dutty" is Jamaican patois for "dirty," and the use of the slang term is furthered by the sample of dancehall artist Tanya Stephens' "It's a Pity" (2004). The message of the emcee's song is echoed by African American emcee Raka Dun who contributed a dancehall style verse to the song's conclusion. Such an alliance suggests Rocky Rivera caters to an inclusive audience that not only embraces men but also strives to educate them through lyrical content.

In sum, the lyrics and videos of Asian American emcees reveal how authenticity manifests differently throughout their releases. Emcees express consciousness in the form of ethnic pride, an awareness of gender roles, an acknowledgement of the Bay Area's progressive

history, and/or an indictment of the status quo to cater to its culturally-activated fan-base. In turn, such songs characterize the Asian American hip-hop scene and these songs offer an alternative vision that strives for systemic change.

Conclusion

> At a time when public schools were cutting or obliterating arts programs across the country, hip-hop became the alternative, emerging, according to one hip-hop pioneer, as the greatest social program of the twentieth century.[273]

> What about *cultural* power and ownership? If Def Jam, No Limit, and Jay-Z empires are examples of this revolution in the for-profit world, then what will the revolution look like in the not-for-profit world? Will not-for-profit institutions co-opt hip-hop culture into their programming and hoard grant money without really giving up any power? Will hip-hop art at not-for-profit venues become highbrow and distant from its intended audience?[274]

In the early 2000s, two Asian American Community Based Organizations – Asian Health Services Youth Program (AHSYP) and Chinatown Beacon Center (CBC) – implemented hip-hop education programs for youth.[275] AHSYP held its program in Oakland's Chinatown and its workshops included DJ-ing, emceeing, spray painting and breakdancing. The director of the program recalls hiring credible and respected talent:

> You had to get people who are respected. You had to get named people. The instructors were all Filipino. You had to give [participants] the 'bling' factor for everything. We had to give [participants] credibility. You could not just bring in anybody.[276]

The list of credible talent included the Supernatural Turntable Artists (STA), breakdancer Gizmo of FM20 and the Golden State Warriors Hoop Troop, and videographers of the contemporary Asian import car scene. The program's credible talent proved to attract youth and its subsequent success led to the continuance of the program for an additional three years. CBC, however, implemented a program that hired a number lesser-known instructors and according to one staff member lured youth into the program with the "hip-hop tag."[277] He recalls his fellow staff member's misunderstanding of hip-hop culture manifesting in a staged performance by youth:

> [The Staff] had hip-hop dances where the girls would learn the dances [of popular music] videos. [Youth] were dancing like Beyonce and moving their hips like Shakira. [Gordon J. Lau staff] were like whoa! This [was] totally unacceptable. Beacon Center got upset that we said that. We can't show this to parents. And the reasoning behind that was that we were the ones dealing with the parents. It [was] inappropriate [for] Chinatown.[278]

His recollections speak to the larger issue of hip-hop authenticity within the Bay Area scene. In other words, the success of an afterschool hip-hop program was inextricably tied to an understanding of hip-hop's cultural expectation of authenticity. Respect and knowledge of hip-hop history, therefore, grants afterschool programs a certain amount of credibility.

Authenticity manifests in the conversations of Asian American hip-hop fans. For example, I recall having a conversation with a fellow Filipino American DJ about Asian

Americans making hip-hop releases. Our conversation was highlighted by the exchange of knowledge that usually takes place between hip-hop heads – the delivery of the emcee, beat making, use of samples, labels, and/or the distribution of releases. Upon showing an affinity for a number of emcees of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry contributing to the Hyphy Movement, I was surprised when the DJ said he was not impressed since I was under the impression that DJs of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry support Asian American hip-hop artists.

My conversation with the DJ over Asian American tastes evokes the difficulties regarding the creation of an Asian American hip-hop aesthetic. On the surface, it appears that Asian Americans perform primarily in activist circles catering to liberal Asian American and particularly Filipino American audiences. The number of fliers, websites, and/or videos devoted to such acts as Kiwi, Bambu, Geologic, Nomi, and Tha Kasamas, confirm such beliefs. However, below the surface, there are a number of emcees – Haji Springer, the Gookstaz, Nump, and Mistah Roger – that do not fit the politicized stylings of their progressive contemporaries. This is largely due in part to two differing definitions of authenticity dictated by the genre in which emcees participate. For the Hyphy Movement authenticity manifests in Bay Area slang that not only codes drug use and the sideshow scene, but also speaks to the rich language created by its multiracial and multiethnic population. For example, while walking through Oakland's Chinatown, I watched a diverse population of preschool youth walking across the street. A black youth called his fellow classmate a "chigga" as a term of endearment. As a youth mentor, I recall a youth's instant messenger name being "chigga510" – 510 designating his East Bay area code. Such occurrences speak to the influence Bay Area emcees have on their fans but also the rich cultural exchanges between African and Asian American youth who create and adopt their own language.

The investigation of releases by Bay Area emcees of Asian Pacific Islander descent reveal a pride for the Bay Area's history of social activism and they continue to contribute to "Yay Area" hip-hop culture. Their releases reveal an affinity for the Bay Area as indicated by imagery found throughout videos and/or song. Sometimes this display of pride manifests in violent imagery as Mistah Roger's *Down For Our City* attests. Ultimately their releases speak to the determination of Asian American hip-hop artists to remain "sucka free" whether they are from the "SCO" (San Francisco), "the Town" (Oakland), or "San Ho" (San Jose).

Conclusion

Digging on the Backspin: Asian Americans and Bay Area Hip-Hop Culture

> If you dig deep in your record collection you will find a gem that not a lot of people listened to. And the track will put you on a path…[279]

I'm standing behind the decks (two Technics 1200s and a Vestax mixer) crooking my head to keep my headphones in place between my right ear and shoulder while my left ear listens to the sounds of dub music echoing throughout a nightclub of San Francisco's Tenderloin District. With my left hand, I cue the next track by rubbing the record back and forth. As the track nears completion, I perform a fast backspin on the left turntable with my left hand to sync the record with the track playing over the sound system. Some dancehall DJs perform this backspin live in the mix after a "hot" or popular track has been played. They refer to this style of backspin as a "rewind."

This conclusion continues the employment of digging as a metaphor by utilizing a "rewind" to showcase my investigation of Asian Americans participating within the Bay Area's hip-hop scene. I will employ a "rewind" to highlight how data collected led me on a variety of paths that influenced this study. In so doing, I hope to provide glimpses into the Bay Area hip-hop scene by recollecting my experiences as an instructor of Asian American Studies courses, a participant within the "graf" and DJ scenes, and as an ethnographer documenting club life and events. In so doing, I will reveal how peoples of Asian Pacific Islander descent participate within Bay Area hip-hop culture as fans, artists, and organizers.

In the summer of 2005, I sold roughly 2,000 vinyl records, two Technics 1200s, one mixer, a drum machine and a sampler. I regrettably sold the aforementioned items because I had to temporarily relocate to East Lansing, Michigan for graduate school. I foolishly believed having less vinyl and DJ equipment would lead to a clutter-free lifestyle, but soon I was buying records again. On one journey I found myself travelling to Chicago to purchase two 1200s and a Vestax mixer from a Japanese DJ who was returning to Japan. Within a year, I had purchased two hundred records and now I own roughly three thousand.

Upon returning to the Bay Area, I was afforded the opportunity to DJ at a number of events. In the summer of 2008, I was hired with DJ Whizkey to provide music for a Filipino American wedding in San Francisco. In the fall of 2010, I was hired to DJ a wedding in Westminster for a Vietnamese American friend. Most interestingly, I was recruited to guest DJ on KPFA's *Roots Kommunikations* reggae show in the winter of 2009. In preparation, I selected and number of tunes from my vast reggae collection, introduced tracks, read radio station identification announcements, and events. My connections with KPFA lead to spinning at a New Year Eve party held by East Oakland Radio. Finally, Whizkey landed a gig spinning in San Francisco's Tenderloin. After discussing our visions for the gig, we spun together numerous times from 2009 to 2010.

My many returns to "the City" were similar to "ScoJourning" – returning to San Francisco after many temporary absences while pursuing graduate studies in East Lansing. I relished my many returns to the Bay Area with enthusiasm and soon found that I had taken the multiracial and multiethnic composition of the area for granted.

My days were spent teaching Asian American Culture at San Francisco State University (SFSU) where my students revealed an emerging population of Asian American youth producing

hip-hop. Students shared their discoveries of local Bay Area talent including Flipeanut, the Earthtones, Elemop, and Ruby Ibarra – all emcees and crews of Filipino ancestry. A Hmong student shared her experiences of hanging out at the recording studio of the Gookstaz – their bedroom. A Chinese American student who produced beats in his bedroom referred me to investigate Nump. Many of my students went to emcee Jin's autograph signing at Tower Records at Stonestown Mall near SFSU (2004) and his official record release party held at 330 Ritch. In addition, a number of students gave me their DJ mixtapes and hip-hop demos and such offerings influenced me to dig deeper while record hunting.[280]

While digging for records throughout the Bay Area, I came across a number of hip-hop releases by artists of Asian Pacific Islander descent that provided clues into their marketability. I found both Estairy's *Hybrid* (2003), Mint Rock's solo release (2005) and Csteroc's *Gamblin' and Grindin'* (2005) while digging in the hip-hop section's bargain bin. The aforementioned CDs were bought for less than two dollars and their low price suggests that these releases are not highly regarded; however, such finds, in addition to becoming a part of my archive, proved to be priceless in my investigation of Asian Americans in Bay Area hip-hop culture. Sometimes releases were misfiled. For example, Unagi's *Beneath The Surface of the SFC* (2006) and *Love's Criminal* (2006) by the Asiatic Knight Stalker were both found while digging through the experimental section at Amoeba Records. I also found twelve inch singles by Boston emcee Chan "Politickin' with Chan" (2001) and Japanese hip-hop dancehall star Nanjaman's "Light Foot" (1999). Such releases suggest a wider Asian and Asian American population influenced by hip-hop culture beyond the Bay Area.

Initially my interest in researching Asian Americans in hip-hop culture stemmed from archiving the representations of Asians found throughout popular music. As an undergraduate

student of SFSU, I collected vinyl, DJ-ed house parties and made cassette mixtapes for my friends, girlfriends, and colleagues. My friend suggested I catalog songs by non-Asians singing about Asia and Asians. The result was a mail-order mixtape cassette entitled *Yello Mello* (1998) that I sold in her self-published zine.[281] Such an exercise influenced my investigation of representations of Chinese and Chinatown for my Master's thesis. Doctoral studies inspired me to erect a history of Asians producing reggae music and this project stopped short of a dissertation when a friend suggested I look back closely at the Bay Area hip-hop scene.

Homesick, I bought two underground rap CDs from my undergraduate years – Dre Dog's *I Hate You With A Passion* (1995) and *The New Jim Jones* (1993) – releases that led me to the black emcee's collaborations with Equipto. Dre Dog, now known as Andre Nickatina, penned two songs with references to Asian Pacific Islanders – "Sun Duck Kim" (1999) and "Blind Genius" (2010) – the former detailing the rapper's relationship with Sun Duck Kim and the later comparing his fighting style to that of Manny Pacquiao. "Sun Duck Kim" is significant in that a Chinese woman's voice is sampled and played as the song's chorus. The dialect, Cantonese, is hardly translatable since the woman's pronunciation is horrible; however, a partial translation reveals that the woman is angry with the rapper. Her anger towards the rapper is represented by the use of the phrase "you are a jerk;" however, she requests the rapper "to never leave."[282] Nickatina's songs offered insights into how the Asian subject figures into the lyrics of Bay Area emcees and these songs led me to dig deeper into my archive to find tracks by Digital Underground, the Coup and the contemporary offerings of Mistah F.A.B.

The multiracial and multiethnic composition of the Bay Area hip-hop scene was reflected in the many events I observed. For example, in the summer of 2009, Mistah F.A.B. and Dead Prez held a free concert at Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco. The event, *Grind For The*

Green, was marketed as "the 2nd Annual Solar Powered Hip-Hop Concert." The name of the event can be read either as an embrace of "green energy" but also indicates the influence of the Bay Area's burgeoning medical marijuana enterprises. The outdoor event featured many hip-hop vendors selling Bay Area themed hip-hop clothing. The audience reflected the multiethnic and multiracial composition of the Bay Area. At one point Mistah F.A.B. addressed the crowd about diversity and "Yay Area" pride before performing "Super Sic Wid It" (2005) – a song that gives a shout out to the Filipino American community. Soon, a diverse crew of breakers performed on the solar powered stage as the crowd – many of which wore shirts and hats claiming their city, deceased Vallejo rapper Mac Dre, and/or sports teams – bobbed their heads in unison. Six months later, *Dream Day* (2010) marked the tenth anniversary of Mike "Dream" Francisco's passing. Although I could not attend, I encountered "graf" artists Cuba and Dino painting a memorial piece on a wall of Clarion Alley in San Francisco's Mission District to the deceased artist. *Respect the Culture* (2011) later replaced the Dream memorial and the piece celebrates Bay Area's graffiti scene and Dream is the first artist listed among the list of writers.

I spent in the many nights in the nightclubs of San Francisco as an observer, fan, and participant; however, what happened outside of "clubbing" provided enriching experiences from within the graffiti scene. After leaving a club in San Francisco's Haight District, Dino drove me to the South of Market District for an impromptu graffiti session. We parked underneath an overpass to be harassed by a paranoid homeless man sleeping in his car as we looked for a surface perfect for a piece. Dino threw his jacket over the barbed wire of the chain-linked fence and hopped over. I sat perched on the corner playing "lookout" nervously smoking cigarettes. Within a half hour, Dino sprayed a piece on the back of a trailer dedicated to me. Although my name was misspelled, I felt honored to be respected by a Filipino American "graf" artist. Such

events inspired me to reflect the Bay Area's vibrant hip-hop scene accurately through careful recollections captured through the nightly writing of fieldnotes.

Back in the East Lansing, I sorted through ethnographic data while I waited for packages of records purchased in the Bay to arrive. One mishap by the post office – the loss of over one hundred records – speaks to the lengths researchers go to construct an archive of Asian American involvement in hip-hop culture. Not only did I lose a twelve-inch single by Triple Threat DJs (Filipino American DJs Apollo, Vin Roc and Shortkut) but also a number of records I looked forward to mix. The loss of the Triple Threat single was especially damaging since the crew rarely issues vinyl. The lyrics of Curt Sak's "Lost My Light" (2003) spoke to the frustration of my loss:

> Lost my light,
>
> My spark and my flame,
>
> My heart drained like the butane,
>
> Can never look at life the same,
>
> Darkness came along with the storm and rain,
>
> Music lit me like a beacon,
>
> Took me through my bullshit.

The lyrics of the Japanese American emcee resonated with me since I also sought refuge in music. Similarly, the lyrics of "Music Is My Sanctuary" (1977) by saxophonist Gary Bartz spoke to music's appeal: "Music is my sanctuary, music is my life."

Despite the loss, other materials such as DVDs and flyers provided insights into how Asian Americans fit into the Bay Area hip-hop scene. *Frisco to the Ville* (2008) – a DVD about the underground rap scenes of San Francisco and Kentucky – featured a cameo by 106 KMEL's

Rick Lee in the music video for Big Rich's "That's the Business" (2005). Multiple DVD releases by Thizz Entertainment – *Treal TV* (2003), *23109: Exhibition of Speed* (2004), *Treal TV 2* (2006) and *Smoke-N-Thizz* (2006) – provided insights into the multiracial and multiethnic composition of the Hyphy Movement. The many fliers collected referencing Mac Dre during my many returns to the Bay Area speaks to the influence the deceased Vallejo rapper has on the hip-hop scene. My Filipino American friend's wedding dinner, for instance, featured a number of placards placed on tables to designate seating arrangements. One of the placards featured the album cover of Mac Dre's *Thizzelle Washington* (2001). This speaks to the rapper's influence not only for blacks, but also Filipinos and other ethnicities of the Bay Area.

Asian American hip-hop artists of the Bay Area employ a unique sense of purpose that acknowledges the multiethnic and multiracial composition of its cities and the hip-hop scene. For example, a flier for the Soulsearchers featuring African American singer Melani Blythe also bills Filipino American DJ Shortkut of the Triple Threat DJs and World Famous Beat Junkies. A flier for the *History of Scratch Tour* (2009) continues this trend. The flier features Qbert standing in front of Jazzy Jeff, Grand Wizard Theodore, former Invisibl Skratch Picklz' DJ Flare and DJ Jumi. The flier is significant since it recognizes DJ culture's African American pioneers (Jazzy Jeff and Grand Wizard Theodore) alongside local (DJ Flare and Qbert) and international talent (DJ Jumi). This suggests that the Bay Area scene acknowledges hip-hop culture's birthplace (New York) while recognizing homegrown and/or global DJ talent.

Asian American emcees express an ethnic and/or racial awareness that manifests throughout their releases. For example, Vietnamese American emcee Csteroc's *Gamblin' & Grindin'* (2005) is dedicated to the artist's deceased sisters: Tran Ngoc Minh Tu and Tran Ngoc Minh Tram. Furthermore, Mint Rock's self-titled (2005) release gives a shout out to the

ScoJourners by declaring calling the crew his "ninjas" – a slang term also used in Mistah Roger's music video *Down For Our City* (2011). Furthermore, some Asian American emcees possess a political consciousness that manifests throughout their releases. Emcees Kiwi, Equipto and Jona Chung produce works that acknowledge the Bay Area's rich history of social activism.

The Bay Area's legacy of social activism also manifests in the hip-hop releases of African Americans who acknowledge the contributions of Asian Americans. For example, the Maroons, a black hip-hop duo comprised of DJ Chief Xcel and emcee Lateef, released an album entitled *Ambush* (2004). The cover features two maroon fighters with machineguns underneath a tree; however, they are flanked with a multiracial and gender inclusive fighters – African, Middle Eastern, Latin and Asian – who are cleverly masked in the shadows. The reverse of the album jacket features artwork of revolutionary thinkers such as Marcus Garvey, Che Guevara, Huey Newton, and Nelson Mandela; however, what is striking is the inclusion of San Franciscan Bruce Lee who was largely responsible for popularizing martial arts. Dead Prez emcee M-1's "5 Elementz" (2006) – a rap influenced by I-Ching philosophy – continues this trend by stating, "like Bruce Lee say, 'Do or do not do.'" Furthermore, the Last Poets collaboration with Dead Prez and Common entitled *Panthers* (2004) acknowledges the continuing influence of the Black Panther Party (BPP) – an organization that had Asian American membership. For example, Bingham's *Black Panthers 1968* (2009) opens with a picture of three members of the BPP standing in a window of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland, California.[283] The picture features an Asian woman giving a Black Power salute while standing behind the flag of the BPP alongside two African Americans. Such photographic evidence speaks not only to Asian American involvement within the BPP beyond deceased member Richard Aoki but also to the larger issue of African and Asian American collaboration in the Bay Area.[284] Lastly, on a

summer walk through the Mission District, I encountered graffiti artist Cuba spraying a mural devoted to the BPP in Clarion Alley. He introduced me to Emory Douglas – the Minister of Culture of the BPP – who was there to give Cuba artistic guidance since the artist was creating a mural based on an original BPP drawing. My conversation with Emory revealed a strong passion to uplift the black community and all oppressed peoples.

As a community organizer, I took part in two afterschool hip-hop programs that speak to the influence hip-hop culture have on Asian American youth. While working at Asian Health Services in Oakland's Chinatown as a community health worker (1998-2001), youth recruited a number of young Asian American hip-hop artists to perform at variety shows. One recounted her efforts:

> The target [of the event] was API (Asian Pacific Islander) youth. All of us listen to R&B and rap. All of us agreed that each of us had twenty friends that would come and watch [the event]. If we did rock we would have white kids, but are target [was] API youth. And I think the key thing was to keep it Bay Area, keep it API, and keep it Oakland for the youth.[285]

The result was a talent show that featured breakers, rappers, and spoken word artists alongside cultural performances. Following the success of the variety shows, an afterschool hip-hop program followed. Youth created fliers and badges for an afterschool hip-hop program that advertised workshops taught by Bay Area talent (see Figure 5). The overwhelming success of the program speaks to the role hip-hop culture plays in the lives of many Asian Pacific Islander youth. One coordinator recalled "the role that hip-hop was playing in those youths lives" and "how it was more connected to the expression" through the "core elements" of hip-hop; graffiti, DJ-ing, breaking, and emcee-ing.[286] Alternatively, the success of Chinatown Beacon Center's

program was largely due to their marketing approach that utilized the "hip-hop tag;" however, the shear number of participants the program attracted speaks to the allure of hip-hop culture for Asian American youth.[287]

As an activist, I took part in many uprisings stemming from the killing of Oscar Grant that spoke to the power of hip-hop music. Amongst the protestors one could hear the sounds of hip-hop music blaring from boomboxes affixed to the back of three wheel bicycles. Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums' attempt to "keep the peace" by employing a DJ and band stylistically missed the mark by playing oldies as police marched towards protestors – among them many Asian Pacific Islanders. The press muted Asian American involvement within the uprisings; however, their involvement speaks to the legacy of African and Asian Americans working towards social justice. For example, SFSU's Afrikana and Asian American Studies departments drafted a press release denouncing a number of killings of Asians by blacks throughout the Bay Area; however, the press chose not to publish the letter. The failure to print the letter continues the trend of muting collaborative efforts between African and Asian Americans. It also infers the power the model minority concept wields over collaborative efforts between the aforementioned communities.

My many gigs DJ-ing evoked the power music has on mobilizing people for change. For example, while DJ-ing my friend's Filipino themed wedding in San Francisco, a number of peoples of varying races, ethnicities, genders and sexualities filled the dance floor. The dancers represented a cross section of the Bay Area's diverse population that spoke to the liberal, progressive and tolerant politics that characterize San Francisco. My diverse selections ranging from reggae, hip-hop, eighties to jazz reflected a keen knowledge of Bay Area tastes that resulted in a large number of dancers. Despite conducting this study under times of civil unrest, my

experience DJ-ing and the enthusiastic response from the dancers invoked the possibility of cooperation and collaboration amongst various peoples beyond the dance floor.

The Asian American hip-hop scene of the Bay Area is close-knit and the success of its many emcees is largely due to tapping into the larger Asian American network. Asian American emcees are recruited for a number of Asian American themed events across the country by accessing this network. For example, Kiwi has performed at SFSU in support of the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) that faced budget cuts throughout the early 2000s. An organizer of the event recalled one of Kiwi's performances "resonat[ing] with the students" since the emcee "used hip-hop to communicate to the youth rather than having a speaker."[288] She also notes that "books are not cool anymore" and that hip-hop releases "records the oral histories" of what "our generation have seen and has learned."[289] Kiwi was also hired to perform at the Asian American Movement Conference at University of Michigan in 2011. Addressing the crowd, he shouted, "If you got love for the Bay Area, raise your hands up." The audience zealously responded by waving their arms skyward. Such a display of love provided solace that some forms of Bay Area hip-hop culture can thrive even in the Midwest.

Some Asian American emcees take active roles in the political struggles of their homeland and this signals the power hip-hop culture has on Asian Pacific Islanders beyond the U.S. For example, *Sounds of a New Hope* (2009), features Kiwi organizing Filipino youth against U.S. imperialism and the corrupt Philippine government through hip-hop organizing. Overcoming language difficulties, the youth and the emcee successfully record a song against the government in a makeshift recording studio. This not only speaks to the resourcefulness of Asian Americans, but also the larger pan-Asian network striving for systemic change on a global scale.

The idea of mass appeal – originally an obstacle for many Asian American emcees – appears to be lessening. As I sit surrounded shelves and boxes full of vinyl (including many by Asians and Asian Americans), I notice a crew of three men dressed sharply taking turns rapping in a highly stylized music video. They are the Far East Movement, an Asian American hip-hop group from Los Angeles, and within a matter of weeks, I witnessed three different music videos on Fox's *The Cool TV*. Amazed that an Asian American hip-hop group could be signed to Interscope Records and receive exposure from a mainstream television network, I thought of the artists who've came before them that broke the barriers and often times masked their identities to redirect attentions on their skills. Now, it appears, that the mask is unnecessary and Asian Americans in hip-hop have begun to assert their power.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Hess writes, "Hip hop is defended as an African-American form. African-American artists often extend this image of the authentic to present hip hop as a black expressive culture faced with appropriation by a white-controlled record industry." See Mikey Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?: The Past, Present, and Future of America's Most Wanted Music* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 112.

[2] See a list of hip-hop songs that include anti-Asian sentiments entitled "Yellow Rap Bastardization: A Brief History of Rap Recordings that Ridicule 'Rientals," in *Ego Trip's Big Book of Racism!*, ed. Sacha Jenkins, Elliot Wilson, Chairman Jefferson Mao, Gabriel Alvarez and Brent Rollins (New York: Regan Books, 2002), 100.

[3] See George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: the Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2007).

[4] See Oliver Wang, "Rapping and Repping Asian: Race Authenticity, and the Asian American MC," in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America,* ed. Mimi Thi Nguyen (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 35-68.

[5] Ibid.

[6] For an in-depth overview of record collecting see Brett Milano, *Vinyl Junkies: Adventures in Record Collecting* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003). For a gendered reading of record collectors see Will Straw, "Sizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997). For a comprehensive history of DJ culture see Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000).

[7] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 19.

[8] Also featured on the flier are Asian American emcees IZ (Korean American), Thai (Vietnamese American) and Drew Deezy (Samoan American) alongside producer Traxamillion (African American) with special appearances by Korean American singers J. Reyez and Tommy C, and Cambodian American emcee Lil Crazed.

[9] Studies by Anderson (2009) and Blauch (2007) showcase how useful the employment of the term "scene" can capture information beyond the singular study of a particular music genre. See Tammy L. Andersen, *Rave Culture: The Alteration and Decline of a Philadelphia Music Scene* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2009) and Emma Baulch, *Making Scenes: Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007).

[10] Wong's *Speak It Louder!* (2004) serves as an exemplary ethnographic study of Asian American musicians. Rather than demarcating what is "Asian America music," she focuses attentions on Asian Americans making music. In so doing, Wong avoids establishing a category

of Asian American music. See Deborah Anne Wong, *Speak It Louder!: Asian Americans Making Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[11] Interview with RT, August 25, 2009, San Francisco, California.

Asian American Identity: Diasporic Nostalgia and Cultural Production

[12] A number of scholars have noted the international dimensions underscoring an Asian American identity notably the Vietnam War and resultant global oppositional movements of 1968. See Sucheta Mazumdar, "Asian American Studies and Asian Studies: Rethinking Roots," in *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives*, ed. Shirley Hune (Pullman: Washington State UP, 1990), 29-44. Also see Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht, "Introduction: Beyond Hyphenated Identities," in *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*, ed. Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2004), 1-14.

[13] Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee, "Introduction: The Making of Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity among Asian American Youth," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*, ed. Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee (New York: Routledge, 2004), 11.

[14] Steven Vertovec, *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 147.

[15] Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 4.

[16] According to Census 2000, the total number of Filipinos residing in the U.S. is 1, 850,314 while Chinese are 2,432, 585 of the total population (281,421,906). People of Asian ancestry in San Francisco County totaled 31.3% and those of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ancestry 0.4%. Disaggregating the Asian population of reveals Filipinos represent 40,083 of the total population (776,733) and Chinese 152,620. Neighboring San Mateo County includes Atherton, Belmont, Brisbane, Burlingame, Colma, Daly City, East Palo Alto, Foster City, Half Moon Bay, Hillsborough, Menlo Park, Millbrae, Pacifica, Portola Valley, Redwood City, San Bruno, San Carlos, San Mateo, South San Francisco, and Woodside. The total number of Chinese living in San Mateo County is 48,996 and Filipino 59,047 of the total 1,443, 741 population. Alameda County, the 24th most populated county in the United States includes Alameda, Albany, Berkeley, Dublin, Emeryville, Fremont, Hayward, Livermore, Newark, Oakland, Piedmont, Pleasanton, San Leandro, and Union City. Alameda County estimates a 24% of the total population is of Asian ancestry and those of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander descent represent 0.8%. Disaggregating the Asian population of Alameda County reveals that the Chinese total 112,006 of the total population (1,443,741) and Filipino total 69,127. It must be noted that these total do not reflect the number of undocumented persons of Asians or Pacific Islander descent.

[17] Interview with VB, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Interview with SK, August 19, 2009, San Francisco, California. Aquino was assassinated in 1983 in retaliation to his anti-Marcos mobilization efforts.

[20] Interview with JS, August 29, 2009, Alameda, California.
[21] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] The Philippines is the most English fluent country of the Pacific. Filipinos migrating to the U.S. are often fluent in English since instruction in the Philippines in conducted in English.
[25] Min Zhou, "Intragroup Diversity: Asian American Population Dynamics and Challenges of the Twenty-first Century," in *Asian America: Forming New Communities, Expanding Boundaries*, ed. Huping Ling (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2009), 40.
[26] Interview with LL, August 26, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Interview with TJ, August 23, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[29] Interview with JS, August 29, 2009, Alameda, California.
[30] The Bay Area is home to two official Chinatowns: Oakland and San Francisco. San Francisco is also home to unofficial Chinatowns in the Sunset and Richmond districts. Oakland, likewise, has an unofficial Chinatown in East Oakland that is predominately Chinese Vietnamese.
[31] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.
[32] Interview with LM, January 12, 2010, Oakland, California.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Alvin N. Alvarez, "Racial Identity and Asian Americans: Supports and Challenges," in *Working with Asian American College Students*, ed. Marylu K. McEwen et al. (San Francisco: Wiley Periodicals, Inc., 2002), 33-43. He writes that many Asian American college students go through several stages of racial identification: conformity, dissonance, immersion, emersion, internationalization, and integrative awareness. Once "white-washed," Asian American college students question their views on race, denigrate of all that is white, attain a sense of solidarity with other Asian Americans, and ultimately construct meaningful personal definitions followed by a unique integration of multiple identities based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality.
[39] Zhou, 40.
[40] Sunaina Maira, *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002), 88.
[41] Benito M. Vergara, *Pinoy Capital: The Filipino Nation in Daly City* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002), 170.
[42] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[43] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Andrea Louie's *Chineseness Across Borders: Renegotiating Chinese Identity in China and the United States* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004) explores the concept of Chineseness among Chinese Americans returning to mainland China and their interactions with Chinese. The idea of what constitutes Chineseness among Chinese Americans is largely influenced by popular culture imported and consumed in the United States.
[46] Interview with GK, August 26, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[47] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Interview with LL, August 26, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Aiwha Ong's *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999) argues that middle-upper-class Chinese have the ability to work and live internationally representative of a global and transnational economy. Although not applicable to all Chinese, Ong's work highlights a new migratory class of Chinese that has taken shape in various forms throughout Asia.
[54] Machida, 40.
[55] William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993), 64.
[56] Maira (2002), 88.
[57] Defunct hip-hop groups of the Bay Area featuring Asian Americans include Fists of Fury, Etai Doshen, and Invisibl Skratch Piklz (ISP). Currently, Lyrics Born, Denizen Kane, Kiwi Illafonte and Bambu (formerly of Native Guns), Emcee T, and members of Bored Stiff (Equipto and Mint Rock) represent the role models for aspiring Asian American hip-hop artists.
[58] Lakandiwa L. De Leon, "Filipinotown and the DJ Scene: Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*, ed. Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (New York: Routledge, 2004), 191-206. It is important to note that Filipino Americans DJs rose to prominence and fame in the 1990s and early 2000s. Subsequently, crews such as the Beat Junkies and the ISP became the role models for aspiring Asian American DJs a scene that will be explored in another chapter.
[59] See Elizabeth H. Pisares, "Did You Mis(categorize) Me: Filipina Americans in Popular Music and the Problem of Invisibility," in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: building Communities and Discourse*, ed., Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr. et al. (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2006), 172-198.
[60] Ethnicity, culture and musical orientation influence the construction of online communities online. See Andrew Whelen, "Do U Produce?: Subcultural Capital and Amateur Musicianship in Peer-to-Peer Networks," in *Cybersounds: Essays on Virtual Music Culture*, ed. Michael D. Ayers (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 84. Such a statement holds true for Asian American hip-

hop artists representing their race/ethnicity, city, and/or homeland through their preferred hip-hop genre (be it conscious or hyphy) that ultimately is disseminated online through websites and social networking groups.

[61] A DVD entitled *Mistah FAB: Yellow Tape Caution* (2007) released by Thizz Entertainment showcases Mistah F.A.B. acknowledging his Filipino American fan-base.

[62] The practice of non-Asians utilizing Asian inspired and/or derived fashions has been linked to the rise of "Indo-Chic" and has been covered by many scholars. See Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick, "Monterey 1967: The Hippies Meet Ravi Shankar," in *Immigration and American Popular Culture: an Introduction* (New York: New York UP, 2007), 129-175; Parminder Bachu, *Dangerous Designs: Asian Women Fashion the Diaspora Economies* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Sunaina Maira, "Indo-Chic: Late Capitalist Orientalism and Imperial Culture," in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. Mimi Thi Nguyen (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 221-243; and Bakirathi Mani, "Undressing the Diaspora," in *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*, ed. Nirmal Puwar and Parvati Raghuram (London: Berg, 2003), 117-135. Similarly, East Asian and Pacific Islanders (specifically Filipinos) have created ethnic inspired fashions catering to an Asian American audience during the rise Japan-ophilia and "Asian Chic" during the 1990s to the present. "Asian Chic" refers to the popularity of popular culture stemming from Asia and to a lesser degree the Pacific (i.e., films, music, fashion, and food) by those living outside of Eastern Hemisphere. Although, the term functions as a derogatory term to describe the West's fascination with the East, I argue that the "Asian Chic" also applies to Asian Americans exploring their roots through the consumption of popular culture.

[63] "Jump on da scrape" is Bay Area slang for riding an old car (a scrape) as one would do on a surfboard.

[64] Harrison (2009) notes that Kiwi "is one of the forerunners in a rising generation of politically conscious Filipino emcees" along with Blue Scholars, Power Struggle and Bambu (formerly of Native Guns). See Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2009), 132;182.

[65] For a brief discussion on the role Bay Area radio stations had in the popularization of hip-hop music see Jeff Chang's interview with hip-hop journalist and radio personality Davey D in "New World Order: Globalization, Containment and Counter Culture at the End of the Century," in *Can't Stop Won't Stop: The History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005), 440-443.

[66] The director of Native Guns video for *Drowning* (2008) is Erika Lee.

[67] Lisa Nakamura, "Where Do You Want to Go Today?: Cybernetic Tourism, the Internet and Transnationality," in *Race in Cyberspace,* ed. Beth Kolko et al. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 87-97.

[68] The Internet represents a space in which battles over the concept of an "Asian American community" takes place. See Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Introduction," in *Asian America.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace*, ed. Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (New York: Routledge, 2003), xviii.

[69] See Ray Salonga's Facebook status on September 28, 2009. "Ray Salonga" is used here as a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participant.

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] See *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, ed. Reebee Garfalo (New York: South End Press, 1992).

Caught In-between: Asian Americans, Hip-Hop, and the Model Minority

[73] For a detailed explanation for the causes of 1992 Los Angeles Uprising see Edward Chang's essay "America's First Multiethnic Riots," in *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s,* ed. Karin Aguilar-San Juan (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 101-117. The effects of the Reagan Bush Era are discussed in terms of their subsequent manifestation in hip-hop culture in George Lipsitz's essay entitled "We Know What It Is: Race, Class and Youth Culture in the Nineties," in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture,* ed. Tricia Rose and Andrew Ross (New York: Routledge, 1994), 17-28.
[74] For more information on the influence of Ice Cube's "Black Korea" on the Los Angeles Uprising see Jeff Chang's "Race, Class, Conflict and Empowerment: On Ice Cube's 'Black Korea," in *Los Angeles: Struggles Toward Multiethnic Community: Asian American, African American, and Latino Perspectives*, ed. Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 87-107 which explores the larger social context of the incendiary song. Also see Jeff Chang, "The Real Enemy: The Cultural Riot of Ice Cube's Death Certificate," in *Can't Stop Won't Stop: The History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005), 331-353. In addition, Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar's *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2007) provides a brief section on Asian American hip-hop entitled "Yellow Brotherhood." He begins this section with a brief summation of Ice Cube's "Black Korea" as representative of the tenuous relationships between blacks and Asians in the United States.
[75] Abelmann and Lie's *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and Los Angeles*, (Boston: Harvard UP, 1997) provides in-depth analysis of the impact of mainstream media's portrayal of Korean American storeowners protecting their businesses from looters during the Los Angeles Uprising.
[76] Multiple releases throughout the 1990s feature Asians as a footnote to the larger hip-hop canon through the experience of African Americans. Songs by Jay-Z ("Girls, Girls, Girls"), Puff Daddy ("Diddy"), and Foxy Brown ("Chyna White") casts Asian women bootleggers, as abused domestic workers, and in Brown's case, equates Chinese people with heroin.
[77] See Oliver Wang, "These are the Breaks: Hip-Hop and AfroAsian Cultural (Dis)Connections," in *Afroasian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York: New York UP, 2006), 146-163; Deborah Elizabeth Wahley, "Black Bodies/Yellow Masks: The Orientalist Aesthetic in Hip-Hop and Black Visual Culture," in *Afroasian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York: New York UP, 2006), 188-203; and Jane C.H. Park, "Cibo Matto's Stereotype A: Articulating Asian American Hip Pop," in *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, ed. Dave Shilpa, Leilani Nishime and Tasha G. Oren (New York: New York UP, 2005), 292-312.

[78] Contemporary examples of ethnographic fieldwork regarding Asian Americans and hip-hop include scholarship by Maira Sunaina, *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002) and "Desis in the Hood: Indian American Youth Culture in New York," in *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality*, ed. Hazel M. McFerson (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 235-264; Lakandiwa L. De Leon, "Filipinotown and the DJ Scene: Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*, ed. Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 191-206; Adria L. Imada, "Head Rush: Hip Hop and a Hawaiian Nation 'On the Rise,'" in *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip-hop and the Globalisation of Black Popular Culture,* ed. Dippinnita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 85-99; April K. Henderson "Dancing Between Islands: Hip Hop and the Samoan Diaspora," in *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip-hop and the Globalisation of Black Popular Culture,* ed. Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle (London: Pluto Press, 2006 (2006), 180-199; and Nitasha Sharma "Polyvalent Voices: Ethnic and Racialized Desi Hip-Hop," in *Desi Rap: Hip-Hop and South Asian America*, ed. Ajay Nait and Murali Balaji (New York: Lexington Books, 2008), 17-31.

[79] Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Bill V. Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Daryl Maeda, "Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen: Constructing Asian American Identity through Performing Blackness, 1969-1972." *American Quarterly* 54 no. 4 (2005): 1079-1103; and Bill V. Mullen and Fred Ho, ed., *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political Practices Between African Americans and Asian Americans* (Durham: Duke Up, 2008).

[80] Fred Ho, *Wicked Theory Naked Practice: A Fred Ho Reader*, ed. Diane C. Fujino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Amy Obugo Onigiri, "'He Wanted to be just like Bruce Lee:' African Americans, Kung Fu Theater and Cultural Exchange at the Margins." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 31-40; "Bruce Lee in the Ghetto Connection: Kung Fu Theater and African Americans Reinventing Culture at the Margins," in *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, ed. Dave Shilpa, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren (New York: New York: UP, 2005), 249-261; and Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, eds. *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (New York: New York UP, 2006).

[81] Greg Tate's collection *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking From Black Culture* (New York: Broadway, 2003) argues that black popular music (i.e., rock n roll, jazz, and hip-hop) have been pillaged by whites. Entertainers such as Elvis, Vanilla Ice and Eminem are discussed as popular icons benefiting from the theft of black culture. Bakari Kitwana's *Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005) signals the coming of a new racial politic influenced hip-hop; however, he continues Tate's argument that whites are appropriating hip-hop culture. Such reactionary claims are understandable given the racial hierarchies present in American society; however, such claims overlook and dismiss interactions between various peoples of different ethnicities and races competing in the hip-hop genre. Such essentialist claims argue for a static notion of culture denying cultural dynamism.

[82] Guthrie and Hutchinson's essay (2006) explores the attitudes held by African Americans of Asian Americans living in a San Francisco low-income housing complex. The study found that Asian Americans were viewed as benefiting from resources and employment opportunities earmarked for African Americans. Additionally, all Asian Americans were seen as Chinese, unable to acclimate to American lifestyles, and crowded large families into their apartments. African Americans were not able to distinguish between newly arrived migrants and long-term residents. See Patricia Guthrie and Janis Hutchinson, "The Impact of Perceptions on Interpersonal Interactions in an African American/Asian American Housing Project," in *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality*, ed. Hazel M. McFerson (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 303-317.

[83] A number of crimes perpetuated by African Americans have targeted Asian Americans in the Bay Area. During the spring and summer of 2010, the San Francisco chronicle reported a number of these crimes and the resultant community outrage from African American and Asian American communities. See Asimov's "Black Attacks on Asians: Crime or Opportunity" (2010), Nevius' "Dirty Secret of Black-on-Asian Crime is Out" (2010), Wong's "Oakland Street Killing: Anger" (2010) and Egelko's "Police Get an Earful in Bayview" (2010).

[84] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.

[85] Interview with BY, September 3, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] The Bay Area is home to multiple Chinatowns. The two official Chinatowns are in Oakland and San Francisco.

[89] Interview with LM, January 12, 2010, Oakland, California.

[90] Ki-Taek Chun, "The Myth of Asian American Success and Its Educational Ramifications," in *The Asian American Educational Experience*, ed. Don T. Nakashima and Tina Yamano Nishida (New York: Routledge UP, 1995), 95.

[91] See interview with Nomi of Power Struggle entitled *Pinoy Hip-Hop Culture of the SF Bay Area: Nomi* (2010).

[92] Keith Osajima's essay "Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s" (2000) explores a variety of images of Asian Americans from its inception to its height in the 1980s.

[93] Lee (1996), 9.

[94] Benjamin R. Tong, "Asian American Psychology: a Critical Introduction," in *Ethnicity and Psychology: African-, Asian-, Latino- and Native-American Psychologies*, ed. Kenneth P. Montero (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1996), 120.

[95] For an example of how the concept is addressed by non-profit organizations applying for federal monies, see the August 2007 Data Report entitled *Under the Microscope: Asian and Pacific Islander Youth in Oakland: Needs, Issues, Solutions.*

[96] Meyer Weinberg, *Asian-American Education: Historical Background and Current Realities* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997), 315.

[97] Bob Suzuki, "Revisiting the Model Minority Stereotype: Implications for Student Affairs Practice and Higher Education," in *Working with Asian American College Students,* ed. Marylu K. McEwen, et al. (San Francisco: Wiley Periodicals, Inc., 2002), 24.
[98] Shalini Shankar, "Remodeling the Model Minority Stereotype," in *Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class, and Success in Silicon Valley* (Durham, CT: Duke UP, 2008), 146.
[99] Frank Wu, "Forward," in *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality. Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality*, ed. Hazel M. McFerson (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), xvi.
[100] Stacey J. Lee, "Forward," in *Model Minority Myth Revisited: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Demystifying Asian American Educational Experiences*, ed. Guofang Li and Lihshing Wang (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2008), x. For additional insights into the model minority myth as it applies to Asian Americans in higher education see Dana Takagi's *The Retreat from Race: Asian American Admissions and Racial Politics* (New York: Routledge UP, 1993).
[101] Bascara (2006) contends that Asian Americans serve as an inspiration story of transformation from undesirable aliens into model citizens. See Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 1.
[102] Glenn Omatsu, "The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s," in *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*. 2nd ed, ed. Min Zhou and J.V. Gatewood (New York: New York Up, 2007), 84-85.
[103] See Youngsuk Chae, "Cultural Economies of Model Minority Creation," in *Politicizing Asian American Literature: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 19-30 for additional insights into the model minority myth, class and interethnic relationships.
[104] Jeung's (2002) ethnographic study of Southeast Asian gang youth in East Oakland reveals the use of "Ebonics" utilized by the youth. Phrases such as "in the house," "what's up cuz" and "mop" (attack) speak to the cross-cultural appropriation of black language but also taking on such language as a means for survival. The essay explores the marginality of Southeast Asian youth wedged between a predominately Latino and black neighborhood situated within the larger American (i.e., white) majority. See Russell Jeung, "Southeast Asians in the House: Multiple Layers of Identity," in *Contemporary Asian American Communities: Intersections and Divergences*, ed. Linda Trinh Võ and Rick Bonus (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002), 60-74.
[105] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Such populations were a direct result of the United States incursions into Laos and Cambodia during the Vietnam War. Refugee populations from Southeast Asia tended to resettle in the low-income neighborhoods of East Oakland and San Francisco's Tenderloin District.
[108] Interview with BY, September 3, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[109] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.
[110] Interview with BY, September 3, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[111] Ibid.

[112] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.

[113] For a comprehensive history of Bay Area hip-hop see Eric K. Arnold's "From Azeem to Zion-I: the Evolution of Global Consciousness in the Bay Area Hip Hop," in *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip-hop and the Globalisation of Black Popular Culture,* ed. Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 71-84.

[114] Interview with BY, September 3, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.

[117] Interview with TJ, August 23, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[118] Thien-bao Thuc Phi, "Yellow Lines: Asian Americans and Hip Hop," in *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political Practices Between African Americans and Asian Americans*, ed. Bill V. Mullen and Fred Ho (Durham: Duke Up, 2008), 296.

[119] Interview with TJ, August 23, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[120] Interview with VB, August 23, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[121] Interview with JS, August 29, 2009, Alameda, California.

[122] Interview with LL, August 26, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Interview with VB, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[126] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

[129] "Veteranos" is the Tagalog term to describe Filipino American veterans of WWII. For insights into the long fight for reparations for Filipino American veterans see David A. Pendelton's "Reparations for Veterans," in *The Filipinos*, ed. (Michelle E. Houle, New York: Greenhaven Press, 2007), 89-93. For an interview with Black Eyed Peas rapper Apl.ed.ap see Benjamin Pitmentel's "Apl.ed.ap: Hip-Hop Musician," in *The Filipinos*, edited by Michelle E. Houle (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2007), 152-158.

[130] This public service announcement aired in May 2005 on KTSF.

[131] Interview with BY, September 3, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[132] Elaine H. Kim, "At Least You're Not Black: Asian Americans in U.S. Race Relations." *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality*, ed. by Hazel M. McFerson (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 203.

[133] Kim, 205.

"We Are Family:" the Asian American DJ Scene

[134] De Leon (2004) documents the trend of mobile DJ units in Los Angeles during this period.

See Lakandiwa L. De Leon, "Filipinotown and the DJ Scene: Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity,* edited by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (New York: Routledge, 2004), 191-206.

[135] See Bonnie Thorton Dill, "Fictive Kin, Paper Sons, and Compadrazgo: Women of Color and the Struggle for Family Survival," in *American Families: A Multicultural Reader*, ed. Stephanie Coontz, Maya Parson and Gabrielle Raley, 25-38. New York: Routledge, 2008. Also see Evelvn Nakano Glenn, "Split Household, Small Producer and Dual Wage Earner: An Analsyis of Chinese-American Family Strategies," in *American Families: A Multicultural Reader*, ed. Stephanie Coontz, Maya Parson and Gabrielle Raley, 81-95 (New York: Routledge, 2008). For additional survival strategies employed by Asians in America see Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1989) and Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1991).

[136] Naomi Gerstel and Natalia Sarkisian, "The Color of Family Ties: Race, Class, Gender, and Extended Family Involvement," in *American Families: A Multicultural Reader*, ed. Stephanie Coontz, Maya Parson and Gabrielle Raley (New York: Routledge, 2008), 452.

[137] Charles Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 141.

[138] Interview with GK, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[139] Interview with LL, August 26, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[140] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[141] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.

[142] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Anderson (2009) argues that raves came out of the repressive air of the Reagan Administration.

[145] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Interview with LL, August 26, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[148] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[149] See the online video *The Very First DJ Band: DJ Q-bert, Mix Master Mike, Apollo in 1992*.

[150] Keyes (2002) argues that ethnicity should not play a factor in "evaluating one's mastery of turntablism." See, 228. ISP's marketing tactics until the end of the twentieth century demonstrated this approach on a number of releases

[151] Keyes, 118. Many journalists of DJ centered magazines such as *Urb* and *Mixmag*, however, referred to the movement as "turntablism" as early as 1995. To add to the mystique of the term, DJs Disk and Babu both claim to have coined the term "turntablist." Price (2006) claims that DJ Babu is "often credited with the discovery of the term." Emmett G. Price, *Hip Hop Culture* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 27.

[152] Interview with SK, August 19, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Proposition 187 denied undocumented from accessing federal assistance. Proposition 227 declared English as the only language to be allowed on voting materials. Proposition 209 ended Affirmative Action practices across the university system. Proposition 227 declared that English would be the only language to be used in voting materials.

[155] See Hard Knock Television's interview with DJ Rhettmatic of the Beat Junkies entitled *DJ Rhettmatic on Asian Americans in Hip-Hop* (2010).

[156] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.

[157] Sharma (2010) notes that many Desi (South Asian Americans) cultivate cultural capital in order to gain entry within hip-hop circles. This notion also applies to Asian Americans hip-hop artists. See Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010).

[158] See http://www.djqbert.com/#press for a collection of interviews with DJ Qbert.

[159] See the Cut's *DJ Qbert Full Interview* (2011) online at http://vimeo.com/21672961

[160] See Janine Khan's "Friday Night: DJ Q-Bert at the Independent" (2008) and Samantha Campos, "King of Scratch: Turntable Master Innovator, DJ Qbert" (2004).

[161] See Pete Miser's "VIVA! La Nerd Hip Hop Revolution!" (2005).

[162] See Sucker Punch TVs (SPTV) interview entitled *DJ Q-Bert SPTV* (2011) online at http://vimeo.com/25433706.

[163] See Womp TV's interview entitled *Quick and Dirty Vol.03: Qbert* (2011) online at http://womptv.com/2011/06/01/quick-dirty-vol-03-qbert/

[164] Ibid.

[165] See Peter Hartlaub's interview with Qbert entitled "Qbert Talks About DJ Hero 2" (2010).

[166] See the Cut's *DJ Qbert Full Interview* (2011).

[167] See Mariol Rañoa-Bismark's "DJ Qbert is in the House" (2010) and Losorata Yugel's "Balikbayan DJ Qbert 'Scratches' at Hip Club" (2010). Higgins (2009) writes, "The Philippines boasts the oldest rap scene in Southeast Asia perhaps due to its relationship to the U.S." See Dalton Higgins, *Hip Hop World* (Berkeley: Groundwood Books, 2009), 40.

[168] Interview with SK, August 19, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[169] Edward Said's highly influential text *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979) contends that notions of Occident and the Orient produced a system of knowledge rooted in difference. Said's work focuses on the power relationships between Europe (the West) and the East (the 'Orient' now commonly referred to the Middle East) and has resultantly influence scholarship highlighting notions of the Orient. Such notions influence popular culture the trends in fashion and music called "Indo Chic" and "Asian Chic." Recent scholarship focusing on "Indo Chic" in popular music of the United Kingdom include the collection Sanjay Sharma, et al., *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: the Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (London: Zed Books, 1996); Rehan Hyder, *Brimful of Asia: Negotiating Ethnicity on the UK Scene* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004);

and Ian Collinson, "Dis is England's New Voice: Anger, Activism and the Asian Dub Foundation," in *Sonic Synergies: Music, Technology, Community, Identity*, ed. Gerry Bloustien, Margaret Peters and Susan Luckman (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 105-113. For an example of how "Indo-Chic" manifests in the United States through fashion and music see Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick, "Monterey 1967: The Hippies Meet Ravi Shankar," in *Immigration and American Popular Culture: an Introduction*, (New York: New York UP, 2007), 129-175. For examples of "Asian-chic" and Orientalism in hip-hop see Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, "Black Bodies/Yellow Masks: The Orientalist Aesthetic in Hip-Hop and Black Visual Culture," in *Afroasian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York: New York UP, 2006), 188-203.

[170] The model minority myth combined with stereotypical images situates Asians in America as a unique marginalized racial group. As a result, many Asian Americans seek inspiration in popular culture originating from Asia and its diapsoras. For example, amongst many music collections one could find releases by Ryuichi Sakamoto of Yellow Magic Orchestra, Asian Dub Foundation, M.I.A., and DJ Krush.

[171] Notions of Asian homogeneity have been discussed in Asian American Studies and Cultural Studies. Chung (2000) argues that Asian Americans are not a homogenous community. See Tom L. Chung, "Asian Americans in Enclaves-They Are Not One Community: New Modes of Asian American Settlement," in *Asian Americans: Experiences and Perspectives*, ed. Timothy P. Fong and Larry H. Shinagawa (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 99. Huq (2006) notes that notions of community perpetuate ideas of Asian homogeneity that she describes as the "hollowness of homogeneity." See Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth, and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41. While these critiques are true, both fail to recognize how Asians and Asian Americans employ homogeneity as an act of solidarity.

[172] For an in-depth analysis of record collecting in Japan see Shuhei Hosokawa and Hideaki Matsuoka, "Vinyl Record Collecting as Material Practice: The Japanese Case," in *Fanning the flames: Fans and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan*, ed. William W. Kelly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 151-167.

[173] William W. Kelly, ed., *Fanning the Flames: Fans and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 195. For studies on Otaku culture see Ian Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006) and "B-Boys and B-Girls Fandom and Consumer Culture in Japan," in *Fanning the Flames: Fans and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan*, ed. William W. Kelly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 17-39.

[174] Many domestic workers and prostitutes from the Philippines work in Japan. This influences prejudice and racist attitudes among some Japanese against Filipinos.

[175] Interview with YA, October 10, 2006, San Francisco, California.

[176] Ibid.

[177] See Sam Chennault "Revolutions" (2005).

[178] Võ (2009) writes, "Little Saigon has become the largest Asian business district in the county and rivals those in nearby Los Angeles. Vietnamese from surrounding Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, and San Diego counties flock to this area for their shopping and social

needs, but it also attracts a fair number of regular out-of-state visitors, who come to socialize with relatives and friends as well as to buy ethnic goods." See Linda Trinh Vō, "Transforming an Ethnic Community: Little Saigon, Orange County," in *Asian America: Forming New Communities, Expanding Boundaries*, ed. Huping Ling (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2009), 89.

[179] Interview with EN, September 2, 2010, Westminster, California.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Interview with SK, August 19, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[182] See Minister of Information JR, "Fresher than Ever: An Interview wit DJ Fresh of the Whole Shabang." *Sfbayview.com,* July 9, 2009.

[183] Interview with YA, October 10, 2006, San Francisco, California.

Getting Up: Asian Americans Graffiti Artists Claiming Space

[184] Other interpretations of TDK include Tax Dollars Kill and Teach Dem Kulture.

[185] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.

[186] Artists within the graffiti scene refer to the culture as "graf" (shorthand for graffiti).

[187] The exact year graffiti became a felony is dependant on the discretion of local law enforcement. In 1994 the passage of Proposition 184 (known as the Three Strikes Law) in California resulted in sharp increase in arrests for repeat offenders. The political climate of the period allowed the police to define graffiti as a felony based upon the amount of damage caused to property. The San Francisco Public Works Code article 23 1303(a) 1994 stipulates, "Graffiti is detrimental to the health, safety, and welfare of the community in that it promotes a perception in the community that the laws protecting public and private property can be disregarded with impunity. This perception fosters a sense of disrespect of the law that results in an increase in crime; degrades the community and leads to urban blight; is detrimental to property values, business opportunities, and the enjoyment of life; is consistent with the City's property maintenance goals and aesthetic standards; and results in additional graffiti […] in visual pollution and is hereby deemed a public nuisance. Graffiti must be abated as quickly as possible to avoid detrimental impacts." See J. Tony Serra, "Graffiti and U.S. Law," in *Trepass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art* ed. Ethel Seno (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2010), 311.

[188] Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2002), 2.

[189] See interview with Mike "Dream" Francisco entitled *Mike Dream of TDK Thoughts on Writing*.

[190] Nancy McDonald, "The Graffiti Subculture: Making a World of Difference," in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (New York: Routledge, 2005), 313.

[191] Lewisohn, 43.

[192] Walsh (1996) provides definitions and a glossary in regards to popular graffiti techniques representative of the Bay Area graffiti scene.

[193] Twist's global fame was captured by a two international graffiti publications: the German independent graffiti magazine entitled *Blitzkrieg* (1996-1997) and the UK based *Graphotoism International* (1996).
[194] Lewisohn, 81.
[195] Lewisohn, 100.
[196] See "Writing is My Life" by Mike Dream at the Lightsleepers Forum.
[197] See *Mike 'Dream' Francisco Interview*.
[198] Cooper and Sciorra (1994) write, "the memorial wall transforms personal grief into shared public sentiment by serving as a vehicle for community affiliation and potential empowerment." See Martha Cooper and Joseph Sciorra, *R.I.P.: Memorial Wall Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1994), 14.
[199] Nicole Sellers, Akil's mother, later succumbed to breast cancer.
[200] This song and video are also known as *I Wanna Be Like Mike* and *Be Like Mike Dream*.
[201] See interview with Barry McGee in the documentary *Beautiful Losers* (2008).
[202] Eungie Joo and Joseph Keehn II, eds, *Rethinking Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 151. Twist's work was featured throughout Jon Moritsugu's independent film *Terminal USA* (1993).
[203] See the interview with Barry McGee by the Public Broadcasting System program Art21 entitled *Graffiti* online at http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mcgee/clip1.html.
[204] For an example of how graffiti culture manifested in the Bay Area before the influence of hip-hop culture see Jennifer Blowdryer's section entitled "Cholo," in *Modern English: A Trendy Slang Dictionary* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1986) and Chaz Bojórquez, Gusmano Ceasaretti, Estevan Oriol and Cheech Marin's "Cholo Graffiti," in *Art in the Streets*, ed. Jeffrey, Dietch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose (New York: Skira Rizzoli Publications, Inc., 2011), 144-161. Also see the Interview with graffiti artist Cuba in which he briefly discusses the San Francisco graffiti scene before the influence of hip-hop culture by Gregory Thomas. See http://missionlocal.org/2011/02/cuba-graffiti-artist-evolved/.
[205] See http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mcgee/clip1.html.
[206] Anicee Gaddis and Cladue Grunitzky, "Space Invaders," in *Transculturalism: How the World is Coming Together*, ed. Claude Grunitzky, (New York: Powerhouse Books, 2004), 171.
[207] See Eungie Joo's interview with Barry McGee in the exhibition booklet *Barry McGee Regards* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1998), 5.
[208] Ibid. Twist has also mentored other graffiti artists within his crew THR (The Harsh Reality) in particular Amaze. See Stephen J. Powers, *The Art of Getting Over: Graffiti at the Millennium* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 53. See also Barry McGee, *T.H.R.* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2010). He has also influenced graffiti artists around the world from as far as Italy and São Paulo. See the Preface to *Dumbo: Acts of Vandalism and Stories of Love* (Bologna, Italy: Damiani, 2007) and Sebastian Peiter, "Os Gêmeos," in *Guerilla Art* (Lawrence King Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 44.
[209] Ibid.

[210] Joo, 6.
[211] Danny Hoch, "Toward a Hip-Hop Aesthetic: A Manifesto for the Hip-Hop Arts Movement," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, ed. Jeff Chang (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 351.
[212] J. Tony Serra writes, "government considers graffiti a 'blight,' 'detrimental to property values,' and 'visual pollution' in a wholly one-sided, off-balance, and alarmist perspective." See "Graffiti and U.S. Law," in *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art,* ed. Ethel Seno (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2010), 311.
[213] Gaddis and Grunitzky, 171.
[214] See Art21 interview with Barry McGee entitled *Public and Private Space* online at http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mcgee/clip2.html.
[215] Ibid.
[216] See interview with Barry McGee from the 2008 exhibition in Japan at The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art online at http://www Watarium.co.jp/exhibition/0706_mcgee_en.html.
[217] Joo, 5.
[218] See Art21 video interview with entitled *Barry McGee installation at UCLA* online at http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mcgee/clip2.html
[219] Aaron Rose, "Barry McGee Talks with Aaron Rose," in *Art in the Streets*, ed. Jeffrey, Dietch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose (New York: Skira Rizzoli Publications, Inc., 2011), 215.
[220] Rose, 215.

Dancing with Swagger: Asian American Dance Crews

[221] Sally Banes, "Breaking" in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, edited by Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13.
[222] Toop (1991) criticizes that breakdancing was used as a marketing gimmick. David Toop, *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1991), 158. Tanz (2007) argues that the oversaturation of breakdancing led to its practice in white suburbs. See Jason Tanz, "Spin Control: A History of Breakdancing in the Suburbs," in *Other People's Property: A Shadow of Hip-Hop in White America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 46-72.
[223] Banes, 16.
[224] See *Finding History Revealing Echoes* (2005) program.
[225] Gonzalves (1997) provides an in-depth exploration of Pilipino Cultural Nights (PCN) that feature dance among a variety of performances at San Francisco State University. See Theodore S. Gonzalves, "The Day the Dancers Stayed: On Pilipino Cultural Nights," in *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, ed. Maria P. P. Root (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 163-182.
[226] Yutian Wong, *Choreographing Asian America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2010), 12-13.

[227] Some Chinese American performers during the Tin Pan Alley era who sang songs were Pickards Chinese Syncopators, Jimmy Ah Chung, Grace Moy, Harry Gee Haw, Nee Sa Long, Lady Tsen Mei (Lady Sen Mei) and Nee Wong. These performers did not write their own songs. Brown (2003) writes, "The efforts of Chinese Americans in vaudeville, with the exception of Grade Moy's "Fast Asleep in Poppyland" (1919), are noteworthy in that they sang songs about love rather than the social 'ills' of the Chinese and Chinatown. These songs offer an alternative to the Orientalist songs of the mainstream. On some levels, the performers proved that, unlike popular misconceptions and stereotypes, Chinese could speak and sing English." See Darren Lee Brown, *"The Heathen Chinee:" Stereotypes of Chinese in Popular Music* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America and Asian American Studies Department San Francisco State University, 2003), 10. For additional scholarship written on American Orientalism see John Kuo Wei Tchen's *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2001), Robert G. Lee's Orientals: *Asian Americans and Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999) and James S. Moy's *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994).

[228] Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 9.

[229] Tchen, xxii.

[230] Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s-1920s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004).

[231] Parreñas (1998) argues the lack of Filipino women (Filipinas) led many Filipino American men to taxi dance halls to dance with working class white women during the 1920s and 1930s in California. Filipino American men came from predominately bachelor communities that led to their courtship of white women actions that were met disapproval and violence. See Rachel Salazar Parreñas, "'White Trash'" Meets the 'Little Brown Monkeys:' The Taxi Dance Hall as a Site of Interracial and Gender Alliances between White Working Class Women and Filipino Immigrant Men in the 1920s and 30s,' *Amerasia Journal* 24 no. 2 (1998): 115-134.

[232] Fiona I.B. Ngô, "The Anxiety Over Borders," in *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities*, ed. Sean Metzger and Gina Masequesmay (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 93.

[233] There are two music video versions of *Bebot*: *Generation One* and *Generation Two*. The Tagalog word loosely translates into "sexy woman." After the videos premiered online without MTV exposure, some Filipino American scholars declared the videos sexist and wrote an open letter to the Black Eyed Peas and the video producers. This outcry was met with fierce opposition since many Filipino Americans took part in the creation of the video which featured a number of well known Filipino American music celebrities among them, Kiwi Illafonte and Rhettmatic of the Beat Junkies. Such contestations provide commentary on the ever-tenuous relationship between artists and the community and the responsibility placed upon Asian American artists to remain "politically correct."

[234] Rene Peña-Tajima, "Yellow Peril Smackdown: A Night at the Chinese American Museum," *Hollywood Chinese: The Author Dong Collection* (Los Angeles: Chinese American Museum, 2009), 17-18.

[235] See Arthur Dong's documentary *Forbidden City, USA* (1989).

[236] See scholarship by Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 15-16; Sally Banes, "Breaking," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13-20; and Michael Holman, "Breaking: The History," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 359.

[237] Jorge Pabon, "Physical Graffiti: The History of Hip-Hop Dance," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, ed. Jeff Chang (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 24.

[238] See Onigiri (2002; 2005) and Nishime (2004) for scholarship analyzing the popular culture influences between African Americans and Asian Americans in martial arts films.

[239] Fung (1996) notes that black men and women are hyper-sexualized while Asians are undersexed. See Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," in *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay & Lesbian Experience*, ed. Russell Leong (New York: Routledge, 1996), 182. Scholars have tied the Asian American male sexuality to the model minority myth. Metzger and Masequesmay (2009) write, "Asian/American men might fare well economically, but sexually they are seen as undesirable and, therefore, not really "masculine" men. In other words, while model minority discourse may account for economic successes among Asian American men, it also reconstructs them as deviant in terms of their sexuality." See Sean Metzger and Gina Masequesmay, "Introduction: Embodying Asian/American Sexualities," in *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities*, ed. Sean Metzger and Gina Masequesmay (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 8.

[240] See Tadd's page at http://www.wetpaint.com/so-you-think-you-can-dance/cast/tadd-gadduang.

[241] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.

[242] Banes, 16. Haskins (1990) notes Afrika Bambaataa created "break dance." He would command rivaling gangs to "break" and dance instead of fighting. See James Haksins, *Black Dance in America: A History Through Its People* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 188-189.

[243] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.

[244] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[245] Interview with GK, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[246] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.

[247] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.

[248] See Mallare (2008).

[249] See Tsai (2008).

[250] Grace Wang (2009) argues Asian and Asian American parents encourage the pursuit of classical music due to its association with whiteness. See "Interlopers in the Realm of High Culture: 'Music Moms' and the Performance of Asian and Asian American Identities." *American Quarterly* 61 no.4 (2009): 881-903.

[251] Wong, 16.

[252] See Mallare (2008).

[253] Ibid.

Repping the Bay: Asian Americans and Hip-Hop Authenticity

[254] Hess (2007), 165.
[255] See video *The Underground: Closer Look Into Bay Area Hip Hop* (2009).
[256] See video *The Underground Know Your History* (2011).
[257] Ibid.
[258] See Tuan (1999).
[259] See *Nump Interview* (2009) by Sick Mix.
[260] Mike Conway, "Fighting Without Martyrs." *Shout* 5 (2006): 19.
[261] The term "soujourners" was originally used to describe Chinese who came to "Gold Mountain" (America) to work, earn money and return to China to buy land. This term was also used to describe other migrants from Asia to the US. See Harry H.L. Kitano, *Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities* (Upper Sale River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 21-22, 204.
[262] See *ScoJourners EPK* (2010).
[263] Ibid.
[264] Amoeba Records plays an integral role in the distribution of Bay Area independent hip-hop releases. See Harrison (2009), 60-63.
[265] With the passage of medical marijuana legislation in 1998, a number of entrepreneurs opened a number of medical marijuana shops that in turn influenced the establishment of many smoke shops that carry smoking paraphernalia such as pipes, bongs, rolling papers and vaporizers.
[266] Sabeen Sandhu, "Instant Karma: The Commercialization of Indian Culture," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*, ed. Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee (New York: Routledge, 2004), 140.
[267] For in in-depth analysis of "gangsta rap" see Jeff Chang, "The Culture Assassins: Geography, Generation and Gangsta Rap," in *Can't Stop Won't Stop: The History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005), 299-329.
[268] Bad Boy Records epitomized the East Coast's take on "gangsta rap."
[269] For an in-depth analysis of 2pac, Puff Daddy, and the war between the west and east coasts for hip-hop supremacy see Todd Boyd's "Can't Knock the Hustle: Hip Hop and the Cult of Playa Hatin'," in *The New H.N.I.C.: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (New York: New York UP, 2003), 61-101.
[270] Sri Lankan American Skiz Fernando founded Wordsound Records after he wrote *The New Beats: Exploring the Music, Culture, and Attitudes of Hip-Hop* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994) as S.H. Fernando, Jr. His film *Crooked* (2002) is a fictional account of an independent hip-hop artist trying to become successful in the hip-hop industry by tricking a major record label mogul.
[271] William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993), 64.

[272] For an overview of the 442nd see Thelma Chang, *"I Can Never Forget:" Men of the 100th/442nd* (Honolulu, HI: Sigi Productions, Inc., 1991). Japanese internment camps have also been described as America's concentration camps. See Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and WWII* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1972).
[273] Marcus Reeves, *Somebody Scream!: Rap Music's Rise to Prominence in the Aftershock of Black Power* (New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2008), 44.
[274] Danny Hoch. "Toward a Hip-Hop Aesthetic: A Manifesto for the Hip-Hop Arts Movement," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, ed. Jeff Chang (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 359.
[275] Scholars have written about the salience of hip-hop culture in the lives of American youth and how such a phenomenon allows for the innovation of educational programming within school curriculum. See Marc Lamont Hill, *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009) and Greg Dimitriadis, "Popular Culture, Constructions of Place, and the Lives of Urban Youth," in *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001), 35-65.
[276] Interview with AD, January 21, 2010, San Francisco, California.
[277] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[278] Ibid.

Conclusion

[279] Interview with SK, August 19, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[280] For more on mixtape culture see Thurston Moore, *Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture*, ed. Thurston Moore (New York: Universe, 2005).
[281] See Tara Sinn's zine *Lycheenaut: Glamour Aliens Pop* (San Francisco: Self-published, 1998), 22.
[282] I would like to thank Hubert V. Yee for his assistance in translating the Cantonese sample used in Andre Nickatina's "Sun Duck Kim."
[283] Howard L. Bingham, *Black Panthers 1968.* Los Angeles: AMMO Books, 2009.
[284] For a documentary on Richard Aoki see the documentary film *Aoki* (2009).
[285] Interview with HA, August 26, 2009, Oakland, California.
[286] Interview with LJ, September 2, 2009, Oakland, California.
[287] Interview with AG, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[288] Interview with GK, September 6, 2009, San Francisco, California.
[289] Ibid.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FIGURES

For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.

Figure 1: The use of second hand gear is often referred to as "doing it dirt style." A six-channel Gemini mixer sits between the Technics turntable and a Sanyo turntable. Elementary school headphones rest upon his head.

Figure 2: A large banner adorns the corner of a wall in the Asian Resource Center during the second night of civil unrest stemming from the killing of Oscar Grant (2009).

Figure 3: A portrait of Chinese American policeman found on Ann Sherry's "Gold Mountain" mural (1994) is defaced with graffiti tags (2009).

Figure 4: *Respect the Culture* (2011) celebrates twenty-seven years of writing history. Among the writers are Dream, Spie, and Crayone – all writers of Asian Pacific Islander ancestry.

Figure 5: *Hip Hop Holistic* care of Asian Health Services Youth Program, the Spot, 2001.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

IRB # x09-707 / app # i025997 CONSENT FORM

Thank you for participating in research on Asian Americans in hip-hop culture that is being conducted by Darren Brown, M.A., Michigan State University. Of course, your participation is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all or to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, you may refuse to answer any particular questions. By signing the form below, you give your permission to include any recordings, transcriptions, and/or photographs made by Darren Brown or his representatives in Brown's collection to be used for scholarly and educational purposes only. While this collection is currently intended as data for Brown's Ph.D. dissertation, examples of other possible uses include publications, exhibits, educational packets for schools and/or community groups, and educational media programs such as video, slideshows, or public radio.

By giving your permission you *do not* give up any copyright or performance rights that you may hold.

++

The amount of time my participation will take and what I will do have been explained to me. Any special conditions regarding use of my materials are listed below. Otherwise, I agree to the terms described above

Date_____ Signature _____

Researcher name_____ Printed name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip_____

[ ] You may *not* use the materials I provided in a project or publication unless I am notified.

[ ] You may *not* use my name in association with my materials.

[ ] You may record the interview with audio/visual equipment and take photographs

SPECIAL CONDITIONS:

For questions or concerns that may be raised by participating in the study, contact: Dr. Michael Largey, 313 Music Practice Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824 (517) 353-9013, largey@msu.edu. You may contact Mr. Brown, American Studies, 229 Bessey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, (510) 593-5720, brownd60@msu.edu.

i025997

Asian Americans in hip-hop of the San Francisco Bay Area

Interview questions:

Personal background

1. What is your full name?
2. Where and when were you born?
3. Where did you grow up?
4. What do your parents do for a living?
5. What do you do for a living?
6. What jobs have you had?

Migration to the US

7. If you were born in the US, when did your family move to the US? To the Bay Area? If you weren't born in the US, how did you come to live here?
8. Where did you and/or your family first settle in the US?
9. Did you migrate as a child?
10. When did you move to the Bay Area?
11. If you were born in outside of the US, why did you move to the US?
12. What did you bring with you from your home country?
13. What family members came with you or stayed behind in your home country?
14. What are some of your first memories of moving to the US?
15. When you arrived in the US, did other families offer their assistance?
16. What community based organizations did your family access?
17. Have you returned to your home country?
18. If you were born here, have you ever visited your country of origin? How was that experience?
19. What are some activities that link you to your home country?

Local history

20. Describe the place where you grew up. What was it like? How has it changed?
21. What community traditions are celebrated today? How long have they been going on? How have they changed? Who is involved? Why are they important to the community?
22. How have historical events affected your family and community?

Cultural activities

23. What traditions have you made an effort to keep? Why?
24. Do you eat Asian food at home? What types of dishes do you eat? Are there any Asian restaurants in your neighborhood and, if so, do Asians frequent them?
25. Are there traditions that you have given up or changed? Why?
26. What languages do you speak?
27. Do you speak a different language in different settings? Why?
28. Are there any expressions, jokes, or stories where a certain language is used?

29. How are holidays celebrated by your family? What are the most important holidays?
30. Do you have any photo albums, scrapbooks, home movies, websites? Who made them? What events are documented?
31. Are you active in any Asian American groups in California? Internationally? Locally? What are they? What do these groups do? Are they open to non-Asian Americans?
32. Of the Asian American groups you participate in, which are involved with activities in outside of the US? In California? What types of activities do these groups engage in?
33. Which of the following organizations are you involved in? Which, to your knowledge, are still in existence?
    Pusod
    Kearney Street Workshop
    Asian American Theater Company
    Bindlestiff Studios
    Asian Health Services
    Filipinos for Affirmative Action
    Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor
    Asian Student Union
34. Do you get involved with U.S. politics on a local level? In California politics? In national politics?
35. Are there any Asian American newspapers in California? Other publications?
36. Radio stations that cater to Asian American listeners?
37. What other non-Asian American cultural groups work with Asian Americans in California? What types of projects do they collaborate on?
38. What are some of the challenges facing Asian Americans in the Bay Area?
39. How important is it to you to promote Asian American culture and issues facing young Asian Americans?
40. How do Asian American organizations in the Bay Area keep young Asian Americans involved in their culture?

Hip-hop culture

41. How did you get involved in hip-hop culture?
42. What are some of the artists that inspired you?
43. Can you name particular songs, graffiti pieces, breakers, MCs, singers which inspired you? If so, were they Asian American?
44. Describe the hip-hop scene in the Bay Area? How does the scene apply to Asian Americans?
45. Describe the Asian American hip-hop community of the Bay Area.
46. How would you describe your hip-hop activism? Local? Global? What issues do you see integral to your endeavors?
47. Has your work received coverage in Asian American media? If so, what publications?
48. Have you ever worked closely with Asian American community based organizations? If so, how was that process?
49. How do you produce your work?
50. How do you distribute your work?
51. How do you promote your work?
52. What challenges do you face being involved in hip-hop culture?

53. How have your parents and/or relatives reacted to your involvement in hip-hop culture?
54. Do you have any recollections of going to shows or other hip-hop events? What are some events that you find representative of hip-hop culture in the Bay Area?
55. Do you know any other Asian Americans participating in hip-hop in the Bay Area?
56. What challenges do you face as an artist in and outside of the Bay Area?
57. Have you received support from organizations in or outside of Bay Area? Describe that experience?
58. What nightclubs have you performed at? Radio shows? Colleges? Festivals? Describe those experiences.
59. Have you ever performed outside of the Bay Area? How did that experience compare to your previous experiences in the Bay Area?
60. Describe the defining moment of hip-hop culture in your life.

Principal Investigator Assurance of An Exempt Protocol

Name of Principal Investigator: Michael Largey

Title of Project: Asian Americans in Hip-Hop of the San Francisco Bay Area

IRB #: X09-707

The Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has deemed this project as exempt, in accord in federal regulations of projects exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. As an exempt protocol, the appropriate IRB will not be further involved with the review or continued review of the projects, as long as the project maintains the properties that make it exempt.

- Since the HRPP is no longer involved in the review and continued review of this project, it is the Principal Investigator who assumes the responsibilities of protection human subjects in this project and ensures that the project is performed with integrity and within accepted ethical standards, particularly as outlined by the Belmont Report (see exempt educational materials).

- The Principal Investigator assumes responsibility for ensuring that the research subjects be informed of the research through a documented or undocumented consent process, if appropriate.

- The Principal Investigator assumes the responsibility to maintain confidentiality of the subjects and the data, and maintain the privacy of the subjects and protection of the data through appropriate means. If data is anonymous, the investigators will make no attempt to identify any individuals.

- The Principal Investigator assumes the responsibility that co-investigators and other members of the research team adhere to the appropriate policies to protection human subjects, maintain confidentiality and privacy, and adhere to accepted ethical standards.

- If the Principal Investigator adds additional investigators to an exempt protocol, he/she may inform the HRPP of the additions. This may be of particular importance to graduate students if the Graduate School requires proof of IRB approval.

- Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the HRPP.

- Since the Principal Investigator and co-investigators are charged with human subject protection and adhering to ethical principles in exempt research, it is appropriate that investigators be trained in human subject principles. The Principal Investigator and all members of the research team are required to complete MSU IRB educational requirements or equivalent.

- Any change in the protocol which may raise the project from exempt to an expedited or full review category must be presented to the HRPP. If there is any question about a change in protocol the Principal Investigator should consult the Director of the HRPP. Failure to submit changes which raise the protocol out of the exempt category will be considered non-compliance and will be subject to investigation and action by the HRPP.

By signing below, the Principal Investigator assures that he/she will abide by the terms of this assurance and the HRPP exempt policy.

_____ _____

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

05/05/05

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