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"LET'S GET FREE:" A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF RAP/HIP HOP, AFRICAN AMERICAN RHETORIC, AND CRITICAL SOCAL THEORY IN COLLEGE COMPOSITION

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"LET'S GET FREE:" A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF RAP/HIP HOP, AFRICAN AMERICAN RHETORIC, AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY IN COLLEGE COMPOSITION

By

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ABSTRACT

"LET'S GET FREE:" A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF RAP/HIP HOP, AFRICAN AMERICAN RHETORIC, AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY IN COLLEGE COMPOSITION

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This dissertation is a critical ethnographic study of the ways four students experienced a first-year college writing course in which Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and elements of critical social theory (Marxism, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminism/Womanism) served as the primary "texts" for critical writing and interrogation. The research sought insight into the following questions: How can Hip Hop pedagogy in college composition engage students in a process of naming and changing unjust structures of racial oppression? In what ways does such instruction become meaningful in the lives of students beyond the confines of the composition classroom? Conducting extensive participant-observation with each informant both inside and outside of the composition classroom, I analyzed field notes and a variety of student-produced rhetorical artifacts for insight into the meaningfulness of major theoretical and rhetorical frameworks discussed in the course.

Findings indicated that students appropriated for themselves the critical engagements offered through Black rhetoric, culture, and critical social theory. Students indexed radical aspects of Rap/Hip Hop, Marxist theory, Black Feminism/Womanism, and Critical Race Theory within academic writing tasks. These concepts also facilitated students' critical democratic engagement against

structures of racial, social, and economic injustice within their own social worlds. Such findings suggest that incorporating Rap/Hip Hop and critical social theory in college composition can facilitate students' ability to produce and resist discourses of power.

Dedicated to the Hip Hop Generation and the many thousands gone...

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

Teaching Critical Literacy in the "New Racial Domain:" Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture as Structural Theorizing

> Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the end, and of those who are willing to get rid of, the worm-eaten roots of the structure.
> -- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks* (1967)

> Man, that school shit is a joke. The same people who control the school system control the prison system, and the whole social system, ever since slavery, nawsayin? -- dead prez, "They Schools," *Let's Get Free* (2002)

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to demonstrate how Rap/Hip Hop, other forms of Black rhetorical and cultural production, and critical social theory can enhance academic and critical literacy in college composition; and 2) to examine the meaning and impact of such instruction on students' experiences outside official classroom settings. Currently, critical approaches to literacy pedagogy are limited as they have fundamentally excluded the politics of Hip Hop Culture. Yet Hip Hop plays an important role in popular composition and can, therefore, be used to enhance student academic literacy and stimulate meaningful social and political action. The basic premise guiding this research project is that Rap/Hip Hop represents African American and global youth cultural

and rhetorical resistance to contemporary forms of structural racism. As such, Rap/Hip Hop provides a counter-hegemonic discourse useful for critical literacy pedagogy aimed at identifying and disrupting the complex institutional and linguistic/rhetorical barriers that continue to severely curtail the basic democratic rights and socioeconomic opportunities for millions of Blacks and other people of Color today.

Critical Literacy and Civic Participation in Liberal Democracy

Democracy, as both a political system and in social relations, is the ultimate objective of the various theories and classroom practices associated with critical literacy. According to Giroux, the popularity of critical literacy within literacy pedagogy over the past several decades, "points to the need to develop an alternative discourse and critical meaning of how identity, culture, and power work within late capitalist societies to limit, disorganize, and materialize the more critical and radical everyday experiences and common-sense perceptions of individuals" (quoted in Freire and Macedo 1987, p. 6). In Freire and Macado's seminal text, critical literacy seeks to foster critically literate citizens by "reading the word and the world" (1987, p. 7), developing students' capacity to name and change unjust conditions that impact their daily lives. Critical literacy (CL) begins with the supposition that, "if one is to be an active citizen, not only does one need to be charged to communicate, but one also needs to be sufficiently discerning about the world one inhabits in order to communicate effectively within it" (Halsted and Pike 2006, p. 52). This means developing not only students' ability to read and write logocentric texts, but also developing critical approaches to

literacy pedagogy that provide students the means of "assess[ing] texts in order to understand the relationships between power and domination that underlie and inform them" (Hull 1993, p. 390).

Students' understanding of the relationship between language and power in texts is then transferred to explorations of language and power within the social, political, and economic domains of democratic society and within the communities in which students live. CL does this work by creating reading and writing environments that allow students to see the world differently and to participate as critical citizens in a multicultural democracy (Morrell, 2007). While concerned with developing functional literacy so that students can participate in the market-driven workplace, CL is "consciously political" as it expands language pedagogy into the realm of critical democracy, seeking to prepare students and teachers to use literacy to change dominant power structures in order to liberate those oppressed by them (Morrell, 2004; Giroux, 1992; Freire and Macedo, 1987).

This democratic pedagogical imperative, however, devotes little attention to the ways that complex systems of racial inequality and oppression are produced by the very structure of U.S. democracy itself. U.S. courts, legislatures, public schools, colleges and universities, local governments, and private industry -- while providing freedom and democracy to the descendants of Europeans in America -- have produced myriad legislation, public policies, court decisions, and other state actions responsible for reproducing crisis conditions for Blacks and other people of Color. Critical Race Theorists Derrick Bell (1980)

and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) observe that laws regulating slavery, the Dred Scott case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, "separate but equal," Jim Crow apartheid, and other forms of legislated racial oppression were not contrary but central to the formation of U.S. liberal democracy. According to political philosopher Charles Mills, the American social contract is essentially a racial contract in which the Jeffersonian rhetoric, "We, the People," really means "We, the White People" (1999, p. 3).

Today, old racial structures and associated racial rhetoric have been replaced by new ones. The prison industrial complex, mandatory sentencing laws, raced-based disparities in drug sentencing, under-funded public schools, and other social structures continue to limit the ability of scores of Blacks and Latinos to fully participate in democratic society. The democratic challenge for critical literacy in the new millennium is to make American democracy a reality for all of its citizens. In order to do so, "we must, first, understand historically how and why these deep structures of racial inequality came into being, and how they continue to be decisively expressed in the daily lives and life chances of racialized minorities and Whites alike" (Marable 2002, p. 35). This means that we must develop critical approaches to literacy that promote processes of recognizing, engaging, and disrupting the indelible racial contradictions in American liberal institutions, the political and economic systems that create them, and the linguistic and rhetorical structures that hide and sustain them--and in the process, construct new, more just conceptions of democracy itself. Without doing so, critical literacy's imperative for civic participation in liberal democracy is

essentially an imperative for Blacks and other students of Color to become active participants in structures of their own oppression.

The New Racial Domain: Structural Racism and the Rhetoric of American Democracy

The current socio-political-educational context raises a number of questions about critical literacy and racial justice: What does it mean to teach critical literacy in the context of the "New Racial Domain" of 21st century structural racism? How can critical literacy engage students in a process of naming and changing unjust structures of racial oppression? How does CL engage U.S. structural racism? How does it become meaningful in the lives of students both inside and outside the composition classroom? And what critical research methods are useful for providing insight into the ways students identify and engage institutional and rhetorical structures of power within their own social worlds?

These questions are important in the context of crisis conditions produced by institutional or structural racism over the course of several hundred years. In his *The Great Wells of Democracy: The Meaning of Race in American Life* (2002), Marable discusses the inherently contradictory position on race in which America's master narrative on democracy was forged. Although the United States was formed with a republican form of government and a model of citizenship that appeared to be inclusive, it established an ostensible democratic political and legal framework that was based on "a lively civil society" with

safeguards for individual liberty guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. The nation's founders "established a rhetoric of freedom and democracy in which the national democratic narrative guaranteed that economic opportunity would be available to all, and that through individual initiative, sacrifice, and merit, all citizens would achieve a decent life" (2002, p. 33). However, as Marable observes, this democratic narrative was "interwoven within the national political culture, the reality of Whiteness, a privileged racial category justified by negative racist stereotypes, passed on from generation to generation so as to become acceptable, normal, and part of the public common sense" (2002, 34).

America's legal establishment and public institutions rationalized and condoned the massive exploitation of Black people. The Founding Fathers, committed to the principles of freedom and democracy, took great pains to inscribe slavery and racial oppression within the most sacrosanct of democratic documents. For example, during the 1787 Constitutional Convention, delegates agreed to count each slave as 3/5 of a person for the purpose of determining the population of a given state, on which would be based the state's number of representatives in the House of Representatives. Article IV, Section 2, of the Constitution also declared that persons "held in Service of Labour" in one state who fled successfully to another "shall be delivered upon claim of the party to whom such services or labor may be due." Later, in 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court used *Dred Scott v. Sanford* to declare that people of African descent born on U.S. soil were not citizens and therefore had no legal standing in any court of law.

Such profoundly anti-democratic actions by liberal democratic institutions, such as courts, had profound consequences. People of African descent were denied basic rights, including the right to bear arms, defend themselves if attacked by a White person, marriage rights, and the right to testify against Whites in court. They were denied any legal recognition of White rape of enslaved African women, and literacy of enslaved Africans was forbidden by force of law and punishable by lashes, torture or death. Contrary to liberal revisionist narratives of racial progress, such state-sponsored forms of legislated racial oppression were neither mistakes nor the result of ignorance about African American Culture. Rather, these court rulings and public policies constituted a social and economic matrix of White supremacy and African American racial inferiority -- the sole purpose of which was to justify the crude form of early capitalism in which the enslavement and exploitation of people of African descent provided unimaginable profits to wealthy White slave traders and plantation owners (Saney, 2005; Taylor, 2002; Zinn, 1999).

Structural Racism in the New Millennium

Today, while *de jure* or overtly legislated forms of discrimination ended with the 1954 *Brown* decision, outlawing the "separate but equal" doctrine, the "bluntly racialized practices during the Jim Crow period" have been superceded by newer, innovative ways to keep Blacks and "Others" in their old place (Bonilla-Silva 2001, p. 80). This new epoch of structural racism, unlike that of old, relies heavily upon use of the rhetoric of individualism, merit, and fairness to obfuscate existing undemocratic institutions and policies by making such structures appear

fair and democratic in the eyes of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Although laws regarding the treatment of racial minorities have changed over the years, the deep structure of White prejudice, power, and privilege forming the undemocratic foundation of most human interactions has not been fundamentally altered.

To be sure, some conditions have improved. However, the "deep structures that continue to be maintained through the pervasive power of White privilege" (Marable 2002, p. 50) have had a catastrophic impact on African American life: tax-based school funding structures that service a separate and savagely unequal educational system that rewards mostly White children of wealth with ten times more school funding than awarded to poor, urban, and mostly Black and Hispanic school districts (Tillman 2008, p. 45); "zero tolerance" policies that target Black male students for school suspensions and expulsions at disproportionate rates; public school teaching and administrative practices that fail half the entire Black school population – with a staggering 45% forced to repeat a grade at least once (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007); mandatory sentencing laws that buttress the U.S. Prison Industrial Complex, which incarcerates 10% of the entire Black male population ages 25 – 29 (compared to 2.5% of Whites) (The Sentencing Project, 2008); felon voting restrictions that legally disenfranchise ex-inmates, preventing them from voting in local and national elections in 39 states (Mele and Miller 2005); institutional linguistic profiling practices – or "Talking While Black" – in which White housing and bank loan agents discriminate against Black English/Ebonics-speaking

callers (Kashef, 2003); racial profiling as official law enforcement policy; and on and on -- all of these elements coming together in the immediate aftermath of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster, as scores from the African American UNworking class perished needlessly because federal and state elected officials placed a higher premium on protecting White private property than the lives of the Black and poor.

Symbolic Racism: The Rhetoric of the New Racial Domain

Despite their pervasiveness within nearly every major aspect of American democracy, catastrophic conditions created by the New Racial Domain resist meaningful public discussion through a combination of victim-blaming or barely-veiled racist discourse. Smitherman and van Dijk identify this new racial rhetoric as symbolic racism, the "expression, enactment, and legitimization of racism in society...legitimation of White majority power at the micro levels of everyday verbal interaction and communication [that] essentially reproduces and helps produce the racist cognitions and actions of and among the White majority" (1988, p. 18). Such discourse is transmitted through (corporate) media, schools, workplace, "traditional" (White) family values and other ideological apparatuses in the service of White supremacy. As a tool for the new racist social order, symbolic racism "represents a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on moral feelings that blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, the work ethic, obedience, and discipline" (Kinder and Sears 1981, p. 416). Symbolic racism often appears as "traditional" American rhetoric in the phraseology of "qualifications," " reverse discrimination,"

"accountability," "competence," "tax-payer money," "personal responsibility," "objectivity," hard work," "patriotism," and "bootstraps" rhetoric (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Smitherman and van Dijk 1988).

Symbolic racism turns the material reality of structural racism on its head. The de-funding of predominantly Black and Latino urban public schools (the "great equalizer in society") in favor of vouchers for charter or religious schools is called "Freedom of Choice." Unfunded mandates responsible for permanently closing the doors of already poorly funded schools are celebrated as hallmarks of "No Child Left Behind" education policy. Racial profiling, police brutality, and laws that sentence Blacks to prison terms longer than Whites guilty of the same crimes is called "law and order." The "war on drugs" (like the war on terror) involves preemptive strikes on already impoverished, devastated communities of Color struggling simply to survive. In these and other instances, public discourse is manufactured and used strategically by those with the power to shape it to hide or justify systems of institutionalized racial exploitation and injustice. Possible solutions such as multicultural education, affirmative action, and immigration are seen as the root of racial injustices (against Whites) --- with no possible relationship to any sort of underlying structure, such as racism and capitalism, making such steps necessary in the first place. In short, symbolic racism provides the rhetoric and conceptual basis for the maintenance of the New Racial Domain.

If critical literacy – with its focus on moving students to "read the word and the world," to identify and transform oppressive material conditions that exist -- is

to be relevant in the struggle against structural racism in the new millennium, language pedagogy must confront the various institutional, linguistic, and rhetorical structures that reproduce unjust material conditions for African Americans and other racial minorities in the United States. As Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci famously observed, state power is not actualized through sheer force alone; capitalist societies rely on a combination of coercion and consent needed to naturalize exploitative power arrangements as everyday common sense. It is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss (and therefore think) things for which no language exists. A new lexicon is needed in critical literacy research to provide what Smitherman (2000) has called "a new way of talkin" and innovative ways of deconstructing the insidious discourse of institutional racism masquerading as the language of equality and democracy. As Frantz Fanon asserts in *Black Skin/White Masks,* "[t]he prognosis is in the end, and of those who are willing to get rid of, the worm-eaten roots of the structure" (1967, p. 11).

Definition of Key Terms

This research project was guided by conceptions of Black rhetoric, culture, and critical inquiry associated with popular struggles for racial, social, and economic justice. I relied on Keith Gilyard's definion of African American rhetoric as "discourses [that] have been the major means by which people of African descent in the American colonies and subsequent republic have asserted their collective humanity in the face of an enduring white supremacy and tried to persuade, cajole, and gain acceptance for ideas relative to Black survival and

black liberation" (Gilyard 1999, p. 1). When inserted into the public sphere through slave narratives, pulpit oratory, civil rights polemics or Black nationalist propaganda, African American rhetoric has served as the primary tool for achieving Black socio-political empowerment in times when racism made access to mainstream institutions of political power unavailable. In this way, African American rhetoric has always served as a *guerrilla* action, placing Black people's mastery of rhetorical and cultural production in the service of popular struggles against structural racism and economic exploitation.

In my use of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture – both contemporary iterations of African American rhetoric -- I referred specifically to explicitly socially "consciousness" or political Rap/Hip Hop. I saw in this genre of Black youth artistic and intellectual production the most potential for moving students in college composition towards meaningful engagement with unjust structures of power within the worlds in which they live. In other words, this study privileged what might be considered Radical Rap/Hip Hop Agitprop (Ards, 2004): the African socialist polemics of dead prez; the revolutionary Marxism of Immortal Technique and The Coup; Common's ode to a Black Liberation Army leader ("Song for Assata"); the "old school" militancy of Public Enemy; the insurgent social and political commentary of Mos Def and Talib Kwali; and even the reactionary politics of "gangsta rappers" such as Ice T/Body Count (i.e., "Cop Killah") were useful in raising racial and class consciousness and stimulating transformative social action. Until fairly recently (see Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook, 2008) messages from more politically engaged Rap artists have

been strangely absent or muted in scholarship attempting to incorporate Hip Hop into language arts pedagogy. Perhaps more radical paradigms of Rap/Hip Hop have been incompatible with "critical" approaches to composition aimed at using Black youth popular culture to assimilate non-elite students into mainstream discourses of domination (discussed further in chapter 2). In any event, the present study drew on conceptions of Rap/Hip Hop that moved beyond general discussions of "The Four Elements" – MC-ing, DJ-ing/Turntable-ism, Breakdancing, and Graffiti Art. And while I was particularly interested in the ways that Rap/Hip Hop manifests itself as regular rhetorical and social practice within the everyday social lives of individuals and groups (everyday performances of Hip Hop ways of walking, talking, dressing, and addressing [Ibrahim, 2006]), my attention was focused primarily on the ways "post-modern griots" (Smitherman 1997) performed self-conscious acts of public composition for the purpose of identifying and challenging unjust structures of race, class, and gender. Such Hip Hop polemics, in my view, coincided with the pedagogical and political objectives of critical literacy, detailed earlier in this chapter.

I attempted to illuminate this counter-hegemonic perspective of Rap/Hip Hop by incorporating critical social theory as a major interpretative framework for the various written and cultural texts introduced in the first-year writing course. Zeus Leonardo (2004) refers to critical social theory as a multidisciplinary knowledge base that "cultivates students' ability to critique institutional as well as conceptual dilemmas, particularly those that lead to domination or oppression" (p. 11). A combination of Western critical theory (i.e., the Frankfurt School) and

more recent work in social theory (i.e., race theory, cultural studies, masculinity studies), critical social theory draws upon a wide matrix of disciplinary perspectives in order to encourage "the production and application of theory as part of the overall search for transformative knowledge (Leonardo 2004, p. 11)

My use of critical social theory in conjunction with Hip Hop pedagogy was influenced by Deborah Appleman's *Critical Encounters in High School English* (2000). She argues that teachers should incorporate critical social theory in language instruction "so that readers can begin to see themselves as interdiscursive subjects, to see texts as always 'in use,' and to recognize that different ways of reading texts have consequences" (Appleman 2000, p. 8). For the present study, while Rap/Hip Hop and other forms of Black rhetoric and culture provided the primary "text" for student writing and interrogation, Marxist theory, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist/Womanist Theory provided the major interpretative frameworks for analyzing the workings of racism, ideology, power in cultural texts and the wider society in which we live.

Marxist theory. Marxist theory refers to political and social-economic theories that identity class struggle for control over the productive forces within society as the main driving forces in history. In general, Marxism begins with the presupposition that society is best served when the means of economic reproduction are owned and controlled by the working class that provides its labor. In this way, Marxism constitutes a direct challenge to capitalist ("bourgeoisie") domination and exploitation of the working masses ("proletariat"). The ultimate goal of Marxism is to develop workers' class consciousness, a

critical awareness of the ways capitalists enslave them by constructing modes of production that extracts the value of workers' labor value for the private profits of owner-bosses. Marxism seeks to disrupt this exploitative relationship through revolution and construction of a socialist society, which would eradicate class antagonisms by placing productive forces within society in the ownership and control of those who work in it. Working class ownership of the means of production would in turn produce a fairer, more just society by ensuring a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and democracy.

While Marxist theory begins with this basic definition, the present study draws heavily on Marxist literary and cultural theory. Marxist literary theory (especially select readings from Raymond William's *Marxism and Literature*, 1977) provided students a critical interpretive framework for explicating the workings of class, ideology, and hegemony within texts (with "texts" referring to both written forms and cultural artifacts, such as Rap/Hip Hop). From a Marxist perspective, ideology refers to the production of system of ideas produced by systems of power to help shape individuals (subjects) through language (rhetoric).

Ideological State Apparatus. The class that controls the means of production also controls the means of ideological and social reproduction, or what Louis Althusser (1971) called the Ideological State Apparatus (p. 127). Capitalists (bourgeoisie) uses its authority over the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) – from corporate media to school textbooks – as a tool for shaping the consciousness of the working class masses. In this way, the capitalist ruling

class has the ability to set parameters for what exists, what is good, what is possible, and what is real and true (Berlin 1996, p. 94).

Hegemony. The ultimate aim of the ISA is to naturalize in the minds of the working class existing exploitative power relations under capitalism, rending labor power passive – or even accepting of – the conditions responsible for their exploitation. Antonio Gramsci (1992) described this process in cultural terms, arguing domination of one class over others is achieved by a combination of political force and cultural coercion. Structures of exploitation create the conditions for their own existence by winning the manufacturing the consent of the dominated classes. This process, called hegemony by Gramsci, seek to naturalize unjust conditions under capitalism as the "common sense" reality of all. What is needed then is a counter-hegemonic working class culture that overthrows bourgeois values as the first step in liberating the consciousness of the proletariat, which is the necessary requisite for organizing revolution successful in overthrowing capitalist domination of society.

Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an analytic framework that examines relationships between race, racism, and public policy. CRT challenges the dominant narrative that sees America's past history of slavery and racism as "a mistake," and present instances of racial discrimination individual, personal matters. Instead, workers in critical race theory argue that is neither aberrational nor a personal problem but constitutes a "normal science, the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experiences of most people of color in this country (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, p. 7). From the first

colonial-era statues designating people of African descent slaves for life, to laws supporting "Jim Crow" apartheid, to more contemporary forms institutionalized, American racism has always been a matter of U.S. public policy. Critical Race Theorists argue that systemic racism against Blacks, Latinos, and other People of Color persists because it is profitable to Whites, both materially and psychically. For example, prison sentencing laws that incarcerate Blacks and Latinos longer than Whites found guilty of the same crimes benefits a highly profitable prison industrial complex owned and controlled by elite Whites. Working class and poor Whites, many only a few notches above the economic position of Blacks, often find self-esteem and collective sense of self-worth in their social position above Blacks. In short, racism has always represented a valuable commodity U.S. capitalist democracy.

Black Feminist/Womanist Theory. Black Feminist/Womanist Theory is an attempt on the part of Black women to assert "a political agenda for Black liberation that pivoted on the emancipation of black women...collectively and individually to fashion an autonomous worldview and oppositional consciousness (Guy-Sheftal, 1991, p. 242). While the current project links these two perspectives for naming purposes only, Black Feminism and Womanism represents two different theoretical tendencies. As agents instead of passive subjects of history, Black feminists and Womanists such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) defined black Feminist Thought as "encompass[ing] theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it" (p. 22). Analogous to Gramsci's (1992) concept of the "organic intellectual," Black Feminists and

Womanists have attempted to remove interpretation of Black women's experience from the hands of bourgeois academics into the service of transforming the real, tangible unjust material conditions that affect ordinary Black women today. The Black feminist intellectual tradition represents Black women naming themselves and defining their own experiences in their own terms, drawing on the long activist tradition of previously unnamed Black women (Hull and Smith, 1982).

For the present study, Black Feminist and Womanist theory was useful for inserting the linkages of race, class, and gender into analysis of Black liberation struggles. These two terms, however, have often meant different, contrasting things. Walker's operative definition of Womanism as referring to as one who is "committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female...not a separatist, except periodically for health...and is traditionally universalist" (p. xi). However, as Patricia Hill Collins (1996) points out, by defining a "Womanist" as "a black feminist or feminist of color," Walker appears to use the both terms interchangeably. According to Barbara Omolade, "black feminism is sometimes referred to as Womanism because both are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community's efforts to achieve equity and liberty" (Omolade 1994, quoted in Collins 1996). Similarly, Womanist sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman, in *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (2000b), defines Womanist as

> an African American feminist; also used to refer to Black feminist thought...A *womanist* is rooted in the community and committed to the survival and development of herself and the community at the same time. (p. 299)

This definition coincides with Aldridge's (1997) concept of Africana Womanism, which is "family centered," concerned with ridding society of racism first, and then classism and sexism, welcoming male participation in the struggle, incompatible with Feminism, which focuses on white women and has a racist history. However, in *Black Feminist Thought* (1991), Collins offers a definition of Black women's perspective that appears to narrow, if not limit, the production of knowledge to biology:

> I suggest that Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's *reality by those who live it.* [italics mine] (p. 22)

Collins definition for Black feminist thought as "specialized knowledge" differs somewhat from Walker's more universal, "humanist" conception of Womanism. Beyond a collective epistemology, using the term Black feminism represents a self-conscious political act by Black women to distinguish their struggle from white feminists who typically consider Black women lacking feminist consciousness. In *What's in a Name?: Womanism, Black Consciousness, and Beyond* (1996) Collins contends that "[u]sing the term "black feminist" disrupts

the racism inherent in presenting feminism as a for-whites-only ideology and political movement. Inserting the adjective "black" challenges the assumed whiteness of feminism and disrupts the false universal of this term for both white and black women" (p. 12).

Black Feminism/Womanism, Critical Race Theory, and Marxism share a concern with the ways that unjust social structures in capitalist democracy reproduce crisis conditions for historically oppressed and exploited communities. By uniting these three perspectives under the rubric of critical social theory, I was able to provide students in college composition a wide range of complex, multifaceted theoretical perspectives to apply to their readings of both class texts and wider socio-cultural forces at play within their own, social words.

Significance of the Research Project

The results of this critical ethnography of Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory contributes to scholarship in college composition, Critical Hip Hop Studies, and African American Studies concerned with facilitating, through critical research and teaching, students' meaningful engagement and participation as critical agents in social democracy.

Critical Literacy. College composition's embrace of critical approaches to literacy pedagogy over the past several decades has been informed by what many literacy educators saw as the impending crisis of late capitalism near the end of the 20th century (McLaren, 2005; Morrell, 2004; Greenbaum, 2002; Shor, 1999; Berlin, 1996; Faigley, 1991). Current developments appear to validate their concerns, such as the recent collapses of U.S. financial institutions,

domestic auto industry, and service economy. This crisis of American capitalism today has resulted in a depression-like economic recession for millions of workers forced out of their jobs, out of their homes, and out of meaningful participation as citizens in democracy.

In the face of such grim material conditions today, scholarship in critical literacy, by focusing primarily on economic or class issues, largely overlooks or ignores the invariable connection between the crisis of capitalism and the crisis of structural racism – both cornerstones of U.S. liberal democracy. The current project not only makes this connection explicit in critical writing pedagogy, but demonstrates through empirical critical ethnographic research ways that empowering theories of language instruction can move students to become critical agents working towards a more equitable, more just distribution of social democracy in the U.S. and beyond.

Critical Hip Hop Studies. This research project is also relevant to current studies of Rap music and Hip Hop culture that seeks to enhance student literacy in college composition. Much of the established literature is devoted to using Rap/Hip Hop as a scaffold to achieve mainstream, canonical ends (Campbell 2007; Rice, 2003; Morrill and Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Mahari, 1998; Sirc, 1998). While pedagogical approaches that aim to "build bridges" or "making connections" between Black youth culture and mainstream, standardizing educational objectives can be useful for ensuring the academic survival of African American students, I contend that such approaches by themselves limit the pedagogical potential of Rap/Hip Hop --- and in the context of the New Racial

Domain, risks tokenzing and trivializing the political potential of Black youth rhetorical and cultural production. The current crisis of the Hip Hop Generation demands more critical approaches in college composition. Strategies are needed to use Rap/Hip Hop not only as a "tool" for inculcating students in dominant language practices, but also for helping students understand the role that language plays in maintaining barriers that limit their ability to participate fully as critical citizens in social democracy. In essence, the current project liberates Hip Hop Pedagogy in college composition from traditional educational tendencies that usually submerge radical subaltern politics found in Black youth artistic rhetorical and cultural production.

African American Studies. This tension in Hip Hop pedagogy between assimilating and/or disrupting rhetorical and institutional structures of power also appears in African American Studies scholarship. Since the founding of its first academic program in 1969 during the heat of the Black Liberation Struggle, African American Studies has and continues to grapple with what it means to teach Black liberation within historically white colleges and universities in the U.S. Answers to this question have differed over the past several decades, depending upon how scholars have chosen to value African American Studies: as a curriculum of study to be included and integrated into mainstream American education; as a body of knowledge geared toward fostering "knowledge of self;" an African-centered worldview for Blacks in America; as an institution focused upon subverting white supremacist power structures that work to negate Black humanity; and so on. The current research project coincides with the vision of

Black Studies articulated by Stewart Hall (1999), borrowing from James P. Stewart, who values African American studies as a "disciplinary matrix" that values and incorporates the various "camps" or philosophical, theoretical paradigms in the field (p. 11). Integrationist/inclusionists, Afrocentrists, Black nationalists, Marxists—all paradigms are valuable within a dynamic, multi-disciplinary African American Studies matrix to the extent that they are useful for transforming institutions and real social conditions for oppressed Blacks in America.

By embracing Critical Hip Hop Studies, African American Rhetoric, and critical social theory, the current research project was informed with what I consider the most valuable theoretical and practical approach to African American Studies: a transformative or transformational paradigm, which seeks praxis between integrationist/inclusionist and Afrocentric paradigms, while also including Womanist analysis and Western analytical and theoretical frameworks--such as Marxism and postmodernism--when useful. Unlike inclusionist/integrationist accommodation and Afrocentric exclusivity, a transformative/transformationist approach to African American Studies seeks to take the academic discourse and scholastic texts concerning Black liberation where it is needed—the streets. Transformationists use *all* means necessary—academic publication, teaching, lecturing, television, popular cultural forms such as music, Rap/Hip Hop, just to name a few—in an attempt to move beyond academic "critique" into literally transforming the institutions that have historically labored hard for the continued oppression and decimation of our people.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 of this research project examined established literature in uses of Rap/Hip Hop and African American rhetoric in composition pedagogy. Workers in African American Language, literature, and cultural studies provided useful theoretical and pedagogical foundations for introducing Rap/Hip Hop as a method for raising student racial and class-consciousness in writing pedagogy. Scholarship in college composition, however, has been limited to using Rap/Hip Hop and other forms of African American rhetoric and culture as a "bridge" or a tool of convenience for inculcating Black or other marginalized students into canonical literature or standardized discourses of domination. Such uses also raised questions about the ways composition constructs meaning within Hip Hop, as some approaches – while well-meaning and useful for achieving established educational objectives – sometimes lead to significant misreading and misinterpretations of Rap lyrics that undermine its usage in the classroom.

Chapter 3 of the dissertation established the theoretical foundation of this project. The theoretical framework for this project consisted of conceptions of language and literacy that recognizes the central role of Black language and culture in facilitating racial and class-consciousness. Relying primarily on Smitherman's identification of African American rhetoric as a sociolect, I also turned to Frantz Fanon and Raymond Williams to establish a definition of consciousness in a way that moves beyond mere "awareness." Instead, consciousness was defined as "language as social action," which was the

primary phenomenon under observation in this critical ethnographic research project.

Chapter 4 outlined the research methodology for the research project, critical ethnography. This approach to qualitative research was useful for providing insight into students' socio-cultural actions within naturally recurring social settings. A wide variety of artifacts were used, including field notes from participant-observation, classroom writings, and a variety of student-produced texts generated outside of the composition classroom. Critical ethnography's focus on language or discourse produced within meaningful socio-cultural contexts made it an especially useful research method for this study, which sought to understand the ways students experienced critical writing pedagogy both within and outside of official classroom settings.

Chapter 5 provided analysis of student classroom writing to understand the ways key informants made meaning of the major theoretical concepts incorporated in the writing curriculum. This part of the data analysis revealed that students appropriated for themselves the critical engagements provided by African American rhetoric, critical social theory, and Rap/Hip Hop. Students indexed major theoretical concepts for a variety of writing tasks to "read the word and the world;" students used these conceptual frameworks for understanding the workings of race, class, gender, ideology and power within classroom texts and wider socio-cultural contexts of their own worlds.

Chapter 6 explored whether Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric and critical social theory became meaningful within students own social worlds

outside of college composition. Analysis of a wide constellation of qualitative research data indicated that key informants indexed the major concepts provided in the course to engage existing structures of racial, social, gender, and economic injustice. Such findings suggest that the approach to college composition provided in this critical ethnographic study facilitates critical literacy in college composition and stimulates critical participation in democracy, beyond the limited confines of the writing classroom.

Chapter 7 discussed the projects' research findings in the context of possible limitations and contributions to established scholarship in critical approaches to college composition, Critical Hip Hop Studies, and African American Studies. Each of these disciplines shares an underlying concern with theoretical, pedagogical, and political praxis – that is, how to move academic knowledge from the realm of mere consciousness and into the public sphere of meaningful social action within critical democracy. The outcomes of the current project provide a realization of this objective, as key informants in this study, in different ways, engaged in what Mostern (1998) has called "structural theorizing" about race, class, and gender initiated from their experiences with Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory in college composition. Additionally (and perhaps most significantly) students indexed these critical perspectives of race, class, and gender in their engagement with unjust power structures (both institutional and linguistic/rhetorical) as they existed in their own, social worlds.

For progressive and radical scholar-activists concerned with bringing academic knowledge to bear on social change, the results of this critical ethnography of college composition demonstrates concrete pedagogical approaches that helped students to read and write the word and, in the process, transformed the worlds in which they live.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Hip Hop Pedagogy in College Composition

> Hip Hop graffiti artists [are] guerilla outlaws who thrive on risk as a facet of one's skill—the element of surprise and eluding authority among writers, the fact that it is sometimes considered criminal to purchase the permanent markers, spray paints, and other supplies necessary to write.
> -- Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994)

> We'll spell it out for you:
> If you talk it,
> live it.
> -- Digable Planets, "Agent 7," *Blowout Comb* (1994)

This review of literature examined uses of African American rhetoric and culture in college composition, especially pedagogy that incorporates Rap/Hip Hop into writing curricula to enhance student literacy. In the process, various, often competing notions of literacy emerged that also receive critical attention.

African American rhetoric and popular culture have been used to "build bridges" and for "making connections in the contact zones" between Black students and language arts classrooms. With sociolinguistic research in the 1970's demonstrating the systematic, rule-based language system spoken by the

majority of Blacks in the United States, workers in composition and Black Studies advocated using Ebonics/African American Language (or Black English) as an educational asset to help Black children develop proficiency in Standard American English. Through the 1980's and 90's, several historical developments converged that opened conceptual and pedagogical space for integrating Rap/Hip Hop into composition curricula. The first development was the politicization of Rap/Hip Hop as a collective response to crisis conditions in the U.S. caused by "Reganomics" and the crack cocaine epidemic in the mid-1980s. The second development was the revival of the Black Studies movement around that same time period, with the establishment of the first Ph.D. program in the field in 1985, and subsequent revitalization of existing programs in major research universities across the United States. This development in Black Studies also saw an explosion of original research scholarship and theorizing of the discipline on its own terms. The third development, coinciding with Black Studies' revitalization and the radicalization of Rap music and Hip Hop Culture, was the resurgence of the educational and literacy theories of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian Marxist-humanist educational theorist of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* fame (1987). Each of these three forces helped to expand limited, functional conceptions of the composition classroom to include the perspectives and experiences of "organic intellectuals" engaged in what Mostrem calls "structural theorizing" the world in which they live. This contribution allows us to, for example, consider rappers such as KRS-One, Public Enemy, and Ice Cube as "poor righteous teachers" of language, literacy, and culture.

This current chapter examines scholarship that helped build the necessary bridges across the "contact zones," connecting the making of knowledge in composition with the rhetorics and poetics of street knowledge in Rap music and Hip Hop Culture.

The Rhetoric and Composition of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture

With the resurgence of Black Studies programs flourishing throughout U.S. colleges and universities from the mid 80's through early 90's (a trend started in the late 60's as a result of the Civil Rights, Black Power Movements), African Americans began to reformulate "traditional" Western disciplinary perspectives to address Black material reality. And over the past several decades, Black Cultural Studies, especially in African American literature, rhetoric, cultural studies, and critical theory, offered analysis/critique of Rap/Hip Hop that would remain influential in shaping academic perspectives on Rap/Hip Hop throughout the decade (Dyson 1991; Baker 1993; Gilroy 1993; Rose 1994; Kelley 1996; West 1983)

Michael Eric Dyson (1991), in *Reflecting Black: African American Cultural Criticism*, rehashes claims by Baker (1991) and Gates (1989) about Rap/Hip Hop representing alienated Black youth's version of the blues, but goes further by offering one of the first comprehensive defenses of Rap/Hip Hop from political and ideological attacks from both the left and the right. Citing Wheatley's poetry, Douglass's orations, and Wells's journalism, Dyson asserts that Black cultural creativity is a reaction to "racist judgments about black culture" considered "objective." In this regard, Black cultural production serves an ideological

function from slavery to the present, with "the narrative of racial unity has surviving mainly as a rhetorical strategy of black intellectuals, artists, and leaders to impose provisional order on the perplexing and chaotic politics of racial identity" (p. xv).

In the first chapter of *Reflecting Black*, "The Culture of Hip-Hop," Dyson says that what started as party music eventually evolved to describe and analyze the social, economic, and political factors that led to its emergence and development: drug addiction, police brutality, teen pregnancy, and various forms of material deprivation." Beyond simple reporting of negative conditions, Rap/Hip Hop served as a vehicle for identifying intra-racial class divisions and developing class-consciousness. "In this regard," according to Dyson, "rap music is emblematic of the glacial shift in aesthetic sensibilities between blacks of different generations, and it draws attention to the severe economic barriers that increasingly divides ghetto poor blacks from middle and upper middle class blacks" (7). Dyson echoes Smitherman's earlier thesis, that African American rhetoric constituted a *sociolect*, a lingua franca for articulating both racial and class contradictions within American capitalism ("New Way of Talkin" 1987). He argues that Rap/Hip Hop -- which is "Ebonics to the max" (Smitherman, *Black Talk*, 2000b, p. 38) – reflects "the interracial class division that has plagued African American communities for the last 30 years...not limited to the ghetto poor" but including content and style from conflicts and contradiction generated from Black urban life (Dyson 1991, p. 7).

More germane to the present exploration of African American rhetoric and

culture in the composition classroom is Dyson's early identification of Rap/Hip Hop as a form of "multi-literacy." He observes that

> Rap expresses the ongoing preoccupation with literacy and orality that has characterized African American communities since the inception of legally coerced illiteracy during slavery. Rap artists explore grammatical creativity, verbal wizardry, and linguistic innovation in refining the art of oral communication. The rap artist, as Cornel West has indicated, is a bridge figure who combines the two potent traditions in black culture: preaching and music. The rap artist appeals to the rhetorical practices eloquently honed in African American religious experiences and the cultural potency of blackening musical traditions to produce an engaging hybrid. They are truly urban griots dispensing social and cultural critique, verbal shamans exorcizing the domains of cultural amnesia. (Dyson 1991, p. 13)

Dyson's explication here coincides with Richardson's conceptions of African American literacy. Indexing the Black legacy of "freedom through literacy," from slavery to Rap/Hip Hop, Richardson identifies African American literacy as a tool or sort of "technology." Literacy in this sense amounts to a literacy process that includes reading, writing, speaking, storytelling, listening, rapping, writing, performing, shuckin, jiving, signifying and a wide array of other "vehicles for deciphering and applying knowledge of public transcripts to one's environment or station in order to advance or protect the self" (Richardson 2003, p. 16). In this

way, for Richardson and Dyson, Rap and Hip Hop constitutes a sort of *guerrilla* rhetoric, a counter-hegemonic discursive action on the part of those lacking ownership and access to prevailing systems and institutions of power. The rhetor has, instead, complete mastery over language --- which is itself, according to Marxist literary theorist Raymond Williams, a means of ideological and socio-cultural reproduction. It is the lumpen's mechanism for using the word to transform unjust forces of racism and exploitation in the world in which we live. Dyson says that the "culture of hip -hop has generated a lexicon of life that expresses rap's B-boy/B-girl worldview, a perspective that take delight in undermining "correct" English usage while celebrating the actually encoded phrases that communicate in rap's idiom" (1991, p.13).

While Gilroy, like Dyson, is considered a cultural critic and not a worker in composition and rhetoric, his noted text, *The Black Atlantic* (1993), seeks re-writing the prevailing racially exclusionary narrative of modernism to include Black "folk" cultural expression—such as slave songs, jazz, and Hip Hop—as part of the Black intellectual contribution to modernity. The "stubborn modernity" of Black musical forms, Gilroy argues, offers "a dynamic refutation of the Hegelian suggestion" that art is opposed to philosophy, thereby placing music in a "higher status because of its capacity to express a direct image of the slave's will" (1993, p. 74). What is significant here is that, according to Gilroy, the historical memory of the common experience of slavery is inscribed and deeply embedded within Black language and cultural performance. Analysis of Black rhetorical and cultural production, then, reveals how music, dance, and other

cultural expressions *speak* to a shared, African Diasporic identity. Recalling Glissant's "impatience" in expressing the need to recognize the liberatory forms of Black orality (*Dream on Monkey Mountain* 1967), Gilroy asserts that

> The irrepressible rhythms of the once forbidden drum are often still audible in their work. Its characteristic syncopations still animate the basic desires—to be free and to be oneself—that are revealed in this counter-culture's unique conjunction of body and music...has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words—spoken or written. (1993, p. 76)

Radical Rap/Hip Hop: Textuality, Materiality, and Structural Theorizing

From the onset, then, it would be fair to say that Rap/Hip Hop has represented a (post)modern iteration of critical literacy and (Black) liberatory pedagogy. It reflects the Freirean conception of literacy pedagogy in the service of social justice and critical democracy, taking shape within the historical and social-cultural milieu of structural racism in late capitalist American democracy. The primacy of the written and spoken word in Rap/Hip Hop and other forms of African American rhetoric and youth popular culture both reflects and transforms the world – or how we see it -- in which Black, Latino, and other marginalized youth confront concrete, material structures of racial exclusion and alienation.

Perhaps Tricia Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994) best reflects Rap/Hip Hop's power to testify to the material/structural reality of the Hip Hop Generation in the public sphere. She examines Hip Hop Culture using post-structuralist, postindustrial frameworks; for

Rose, the rise of Rap/Hip Hop must be attributed to devastating material conditions in urban areas throughout the1970's: cities losing federal funding for social services; the rapid transition from an industrial to service-based economy; the construction of the Cross-Bronx expressway and destruction of stable, working-class Black neighborhoods, and their replacement with high-rise apartment housing projects; neighborhood red-lining by the New York City real estate apparatus; deterioration of NYC urban schools and – significantly – the elimination of school music programs; White flight, slumlords, abandonment of private and public property and creation of vast areas of blighted, urban "no-man's land;" city location of toxic waste dumps in poor Black and Latino communities – all these things created the necessary conditions and contradictions for the rise of Rap/Hip Hop as an oppositional cultural and rhetorical practice. She notes that virtually every one of the early innovators in Rap/Hip Hop in its inception were trained for jobs in fields that were shrinking or that no longer existed due to outsourcing or advances in technology that made their jobs obsolete. Through MC-ing, breaking, DJ-ing, and graffiti-writing, Black youth caught in the violence of deindustrialization in late capitalism assert collective agency, humanity, individuality; it is a form of social and political resistance, as well as a form of pleasure and enjoyment to "ease the pain" like its blues and jazz antecedents.

Rose identifies the performance of Rap music and Hip Hop Culture -- like Dyson, Baker, and Gilroy – as a form of critical literacy, one in which rapping, Mc-ing, DJ-ing, and break dancing inserted into the public sphere transforms city

space into a "text" itself. The construction of a Hip Hop graffiti "text," for example, or graffiti-making process is analogous to the writing process. Rose observes that Hip Hop artists "work out elaborate designs and patterns in notebooks, test new markers and brands of spray paints and colors well in advance." Beyond a sort of functional literacy for individual self-expression, graffiti writing represents a kind of critical literacy, wherein Hip Hop urban Picassos literally – by identifying urban public space as their canvass – read and write the word and the world.

In this way, the rhetoric and composition of Rap/Hip Hop becomes conceptual to Freirian notions of literacy for empowerment and resistance. Youth of Color relegated to the periphery of society become producers of language and culture towards asserting identity and agency through public acts of composition. Rap lyrics attest to the fact that, though widely considered firmly located in the African Oral Tradition, Rap begins "with a pen and a pad" ["A pen and a paper/a stereo and tape and/me and Erick B. and a nice big plate of fish, which is my favorite dish/but without the money it's still a wish" – Eric B. and Rakim, "Paid in Full," (1987)]. Public acts of composition in Hip Hop represent an insurrectionary rhetorical action, as in Hip Hop art in the form of "graffiti." Rose identifies Hip Hop graffiti artists

> as guerilla outlaws who thrive on risk as a facet of one's skill—the element of surprise and eluding authority among writers, the fact that it is sometimes considered criminal to purchase the permanent markers, spray paints, and other supplies necessary to write. Subway cars are stored in well-protected but dangerous yards that

heighten the degree of difficulty in execution. An especially difficult and creative concept, coloration and style are all the more appreciated when they are executed under duress. Well-executed train work is a sign of mastering the expression. (43)

Robin D.G. Kelly corroborates Rose's analysis of Hip Hop as post-industrial product in *Race Rebels* (1996). Focusing his analysis on "history from below," Kelley is concerned with the daily race struggle of ordinary Black folks that do not fit easy definitions of "working class" because of the implicit racial logic implied in the term (working class = White folk), and do not belong to any established working class movement but engage in class struggle nevertheless. He sees Rap/Hip Hop as a manifestation of this organic but largely unrecognized struggle of working class Blacks fighting to overcome the cultural contradictions of late capitalism – the abolition of *de jure* or legal segregation and yet the persistence of institutionalized or structural racism creating apartheid-like conditions in urban ghettos -- for access to public space, individual creativity, and social-political agency within the devastations of urban areas in post-industrial urban America.

In "Chain Remain the Same: Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation," Smitherman (1997) analyzes African American Language (AAL) and rhetorical practices in Rap/Hip Hop, placing it within the historical struggle of enslaved Africans and their descendants "disturb the peace" of the racist status quo. Through sociolinguistic analysis of Black Language practices in Rap lyrics, Smitherman, more precisely than West and de Genova, identifies the ways that a

combination of race and class struggle is embedded within discursive and rhetorical structures of Rap/Hip Hop For example, Smitherman observes that

> AAL is a product of free African slave labor, having evolved from a 17th-century pidgin English that was a lingua franca in the linguistically diverse enslavement communities throughout Britain's North American colonies that became the United States of America. The pidgin blended European American English (hereafter EAL) with patterns from the Niger-Congo family of African languages (e.g., Yoruba, Wolof, Efik, mi-see, e.g., Asante, 1990; Turner, 1949). The result of this blend was a communication system that functioned as both a resistance language and a linguistic bond of cultural and racial solidarity for those born under the lash. (1997, p. 7 - 8)

Smitherman synthesizes the dialectic between Western (gloss: White) critical theory and Black cultural studies that characterizes much of the scholarship on Rap/Hip Hop by identifying the rapper as "postmodern African griot, the verbally gifted storyteller and cultural historian in traditional African society" (p. 4). This griot's role within postmodern society is "to speak the truth" about "conditions of joblessness, poverty, and disempowerment which continue to be the norm for the Black UN working class" (p. 5).

Osinubi (2002) recalls Smitherman's race/class analysis of Black Language and rhetoric in Rap/Hip Hop by examining Rap lyrics through the lens of post-colonial theory. She identifies Rappers as "new age civil rights fighters"

who "take AAE further away from the mainstream accommodation voice of LWC" (p. 593). Osinubi contends that this move is to reestablish the AAE community as the central, generating force of power, language, and self-identification. Contemporary displays in the lyrics and the rhythms of the rap singers echo the ideology of response and survival in the Hip Hop Culture. The rappers' oratorical style appears to be confrontational, especially because they see themselves as leaders against the colonizer and champions of the dispossessed. Rappers such as Sistah Sojah, Tupac Shakur, Arrested Development, and others like them define themselves as word warriors in a battle against oppression.

Similarly, Dimitriadis (1996) identifies Rap/Hip Hop as "text." He looks at narrative structure in Hip Hop, open and closed structures that allow for improvisation, one of the defining characteristics of Black artistic and cultural expression. The author makes a radical connection between artistic improvisation in spirituals, blues, jazz, and Rap/Hip Hop and Black radical social transformation. The artist, while in the performance of improvising, shapes the larger social context as the music is shaped spontaneously. White western music in contrast is marked by post-renaissance, closed, rigid structures that predetermine the experience and social context within which the music is played. While this piece is highly theoretical and does not relate explicitly to writing pedagogy in college composition, it has potentially powerful implications for critical pedagogy and literacy, and for teaching students the narrative essay through Black expressions such as Rap/Hip Hop.

What's significant here is that Rap/Hip Hop is identified by Smitherman, Osinubi, Kelley, Rose, Dyson, and others as Black signifying practices inscribing the material reality of *post-Brown* structures of racial discrimination and social alienation in the aftermath of the proclaimed victors of the Civil Rights Movements. Such rhetorical and cultural inscriptions, then, provide valuable textual material for critical approaches to literacy pedagogy engaging issues of racial justice in college composition. Additionally, early critical studies of Rap/Hip Hop expand notions of literacy and textuality beyond logocentric conceptions of writing, rhetoric, and composition. Black and marginalized youth's rhetorical and cultural production become central for understanding the social-political-economic forces impacting the ways they read (and write) the word and the world.

"Ebonics to the Max:" Rap/Hip Hop and African American Language

"Rap Music...is U.S. Ebonics to the Max" (Smitherman 2000, p. 38)

This expanded notion of African American literacy, reflected in much of Rap/Hip Hop, that seeks to connect Black Language and culture to the social-cultural-political worlds of marginalized students is rooted in struggles against linguistic discrimination and years of scholarship recognizing African American Language (AAL, or Ebonics, Black English, or African American Vernacular English) -- a systematic, rule-governed language system spoken by the majority of people of African descent in the U.S. – as an important component of language instruction for Black English-speaking students. This struggle finds it antecedent in the 1974 Conference on College Composition and

Communication's "Students' Right to their Own Language" Resolution, but explodes into the realm of U.S. public policy in 1979, with the *Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School Children v. Ann School District Board*, commonly known as the "Black English" case. With testimony from the chief expert witness, sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman , African American parents successfully sued the Ann Arbor school district board for placing their children in classes for students with learning disabilities using linguistic and other differences. The presiding judge, Charles W. Joiner, ruled that teachers had failed to provide equal educational opportunity to the children based on their language differences, i.e., they spoke "Black English." As Judge Joiner put it, "It is a straightforward effort to require the court to intervene on the children's behalf to require the defendant School District Board to take appropriate action to teach them to read in the standard English of the school, the commercial world, the arts, science and professions. This action is a cry for judicial help in opening the doors to the establishment...It is an action to keep another generation from becoming functionally illiterate" (quoted in Smitherman 2000, p. 132).

In addition to finding the Ann Arbor School District and its teachers guilty of violating the students' civil rights, as outlined in the language provision of the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunity Act, Judge Joiner recommended that teachers undergo training to learn the dynamics of AAL grammar and discourse style. The objective of this recommendation was to help prevent what he called linguistic discrimination by making teachers aware of AAL's legitimacy and, therefore, combat teachers' negative perceptions of AAL and students who

spoke it. Formal training in AAL grammar (syntax, semantics, phonology, and pragmatics) would help teachers develop respect for AAL as another equally viable systematic and robust means of interpersonal communication. Hence, Joiner's ruling and recommendation, at least legally for that time in educational history, affirmed AAL as a valuable resource for classroom language instruction.

Preceding Joiner's recommendation, Smitherman (1977) asked, "How can [we] use what the kids already know to move them to what they need to know" (p. 219). On the heels of Smitherman's question about language pedagogy and linguistic development that starts from the child, other scholars (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Irvine, 1991; Kozol, 1991; and Ogbu, 1978) interested in the education of African American children began to pay close attention to our pedagogical failure to address Smitherman's question. Hence, the question remained: how do we connect the distant social worlds of African American students—home and school—so that they can be more academically successful?

The Contrastive Turn

On the heels of the "Black English Case" and with the fuss over using what African American students know to craft more integrative instructional models, recent and more popular language pedagogies have celebrated contrastive analysis programs. For example, some researchers (Clark, 1997) have looked at code-switching approaches as a way to bridge the achievement gap between African American students and those students who speak dialects of English closely related to Standard American English (SAE). Instead of viewing students' "home language" as careless and mistake-ridden, contrastive

analysis programs use students' "home" or first language as the basis for teaching SAE. This approach, in relation to African American students, was originally conceived as a strategy to liberate African American students from harsh correctivist boundaries, helping them learn and perhaps master SAE in order to enhance their school destinies which would promise greater economic and social prosperity (Palacas, 2001).

Research suggests that contrastive analysis programs have helped some African American students increase SAE reading and writing proficiency. Hanni Taylor's (1991) study illustrates how this approach significantly reduced the frequency of AAL features appearing in student compositions. Working with African American freshmen taking a college remedial writing course, Taylor developed and taught a curriculum that incorporated AAL and Black culture to an African American experimental group. Her control group received traditional (or correctivist) language instruction. Taylor found that the experimental group reduced their use of AAL features by 59.3 percent in their essays, while the control group increased theirs by 8.5 percent.

Years earlier, Simpkins, Holt, and Simpkins (1974) developed a contrastive analysis program for reading instruction called *Bridge*. This program was created to enhance students' reading comprehension by providing reading materials written in both AAL and SAE. Students began reading and responding to stories such as "Shine" which contained AAL and Black popular cultural references. As the student progressed through the curriculum, the curricular content gradually shifted. In addition to focusing on text composed in AAL,

students also began to read texts written in SAE. Using both experimental and control groups in five states, working with students in grades 7-12, the team of researchers found that the experimental groups made a 6.2 month reading gain over a four month period, while the control group gained only 1.5 months during the same time frame. *Bridge* gave early support to the assertion that the language and culture that Black students brought with them into language arts classrooms could be treated as "linguistic gifts" (Troutman 1997) instead of linguistic rubbish.

More recently, Kelli Harris-Wright (1999) mirrored these results in a similar, large-scale contrastive analysis program in DeKalb County, Georgia. Harris-Wright's bi-dialectical contrastive curriculum was shown to increase reading scores. After receiving bi-dialectical language instruction, Harris Wright's experimental group's reading scores increased, while students in her control group received worse scores at the end of the school year than they had at the beginning. Both Simpkins, Holt, and Simpkins and Harris-Wright's results resemble Taylor's, in that all three studies demonstrate the effectiveness of contrastive analysis programs in helping African American students improve SAE language and literacy.

However, taught uncritically, contrastive analysis programs like these are virtually ineffective at altering negative attitudes toward students' language. Contrastive analysis programs like the ones used in the Simpkins, Holt, and Simpkins, Harris-Wright, and Taylor studies avoid directly addressing three major sociolinguistic themes that are consistent throughout language learning and use:

the relationship between *language and the individual*, the relationship between *language and society*, and the relationship between *language and power*. In doing so, contrastive analysis programs leave unchecked the pervasive racist assumptions that require African American students to alter their language in the first place. By focusing upon using AAL simply as a "scaffold" (up) to SAE, contrastive analysis programs reinforce the asymmetrical positioning between the two languages—relegating AAL (as well as the people who speak it) to an inferior and utterly subordinate social position. While most scholars put forth contrastive analysis (which can be broadly conceived as "bi-dialectalism") as an effective strategy for teaching SAE to African American students, Smitherman (1988) observes,

> The underlying assumption was that even if all dialects are equal, some are more equal than others. Blacks, then, would have to learn White English although Whites would not have to learn Black English. Thus, the term "bi-dialectalism" was a misnomer, which obfuscated the racism of policies and practices that would discriminate against Blacks because of the blackness of Black English. Instead of focusing on racism and acts of discrimination...scholars, in effect, blamed the victims for their failure to conform to White linguistic (and/or cognitive) standards. Through this kind of academic discourse in the Black Power era, racism was reproduced in another form. As White linguist James Sledd argued (1969), bi-dialecticism was, at bottom, the "linguistics of White supremacy." (p. 80)

By avoiding the relationships between language and the individual, language and society, and language and power, contrastive analysis programs leave unbridled the widely held racist assumptions that require Black people to code-switch in the first place. As presented, research on contrastive analysis programs—beyond mere "inclusion" in classrooms—offer little towards altering the conception of AAL as deficient speech (possibly of deficient people).

Contrastive Approaches to Hip Hop Pedagogy in College Composition

In much the same way, workers in college composition have turned to AAL as a useful tool for inculcating Black students into standard, canonical forms of literature and literacy. While such approaches surpass bi-dialectalism/contrastive approaches to AAL/SAE in its attempts to incorporate both Black Language and culture, uses of Rap/Hip Hop in composition has been limited to "making connections" or "building bridges" for Black students to access mainstream discourses of domination. Nevertheless, this work, like earlier contrastive approaches, provided important foundations for more critical pedagogical approaches to Black Language and culture that would follow. The efforts of noted African American literature scholar and cultural critic Houston Baker, in "Hybridity, the Rap Race, and Pedagogy for the 1990s" (1991) represents an early attempt to use Rap/Hip Hop as a "bridge" to connect urban Black (Afro-Caribbian-British) college students to Western, canonical literature and values. Teaching a mostly Black college-level literature class in Brixton, Great Britain, Baker tries to make the Western canon relevant to the social-cultural worlds of marginalized students through Rap music and Hip Hop Culture.

Mirroring contrastive analysis, Baker compares the rhetorical performance of Henry V (and by implication, William Shakespeare) to modern day rappers, and noted that the King could be considered a gangsta figure who was "paid in full" (Baker, 227). Such comparisons stem from Baker's recognition of Rap/Hip Hop as "a place of direct action protest against authority," such as NWA's "Fuck Tha Police." For Brixton's Black students, who confront not only racial discrimination but also class alienation, Baker says Hip Hop's "postmodernity is a lower-class, black urban emergent speaking to (as Public Enemy has it) "a nation of millions." The success of Rap/Hip Hop for college language arts, for Baker, is found in its hybridity, "a variety of sounds coming together to arouse interest in a classic work of Shakespearean creation" (p. 227).

Janet Irby's "Empowering the Disempowered: Publishing Student Voices" (1993) is less sensitive to Baker's theoretical concerns, presenting an approach to Rap/Hip Hop in the language arts classroom that could be aptly named a "pedagogy of desperation." She prefaces her use of Rap/Hip Hop by stating "I had nothing to lose," and that she was startled to be unexpectedly confronted with a class full of non-White students "so diverse that I cound never meet their needs with a single set of lessons" (p. 50). Hip Hop becomes a convenient tool to help students "collaborate and use language in meaningful ways by incorporating their experiences and abilities and creating their unique vision of the world" (p. 52). Like Houston Baker, Irby uses Rap/Hip Hop contrastively, juxtaposing so-called "gangsta rapper" Ice T to "pop vamp Madonna," and comparing John Updike's "A&P" with then-contemporary issues ranging from

failures in urban education to the Los Angeles race riots. While never incorporating Rap/Hip Hop music and culture itself, Irby has students generate writing topics from two articles with Hip Hop subject matter about voting and social issues. After studying the language and structure of the articles, students constructed research, interviews, and engaged in collaborative writing with the aim of producing a class publication. The rhetoric of Rap/Hip Hop, while excluded from classroom instruction, provides this "diverse" class with a sounding board for students' production of Standard American English and genres of writing.

This use of Rap/Hip Hop as a tool of convenience in composition pedagogy risks tokenizing and trivializing the real, material reality of structural racism, social alienation, and educational and linguistic discrimination confronting members of Black, Latino, and other marginalized youth in late capitalist society. It also raises important questions about voice and the politics of representation when composition instructors – who turn to Black youth popular culture for achieving traditional established academic ends alone – superimpose a priori meaning on interpretations of Rap/Hip Hip in the language classroom.

This is evident in Geoffrey Sirc's "Never Mind the Sex Pistols, Where's 2Pac" (1998). While sharing some theoretical concerns with Baker (1991) and Gilroy (1993), for example identifying Rap/Hip Hop as an essentially modern art form, Sirc, like Irby, turns to Black youth rhetorical and cultural production as a coping mechanism after being unexpectedly confronted with Black and Brown faces in his composition classroom. His incorporation of Rap/Hip Hop stems from

what he sees as the "potential boredom" of older material, and instead he turns to gangsta rap. His interpretation of Rap/Hip Hop is informed by his argument about punk music: Rap/Hip Hop, like punk, is defined by negation or the rejection of a search for truth or solutions to major problems confronting participants in the culture. Echoing Gilroy's main argument in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Sirc asserts that gangsta rap, like punk music, is steeped in modernity as much as The Clash. He goes on to connect Richard Wright's alienated, transformational protagonists to the pimp chronicles of Oakland gangsta rapper Too $hort. He says that "Gangsta works in the writing class as it does in the broader culture, to organize an inherent cultural disaffection. But it doesn't try (as hip-hop does) to turn such anomie in any positive direction" (p. 105). This is wrong, of course, as much of so-called gangsta rap operates as street journalism, composing the realities of social alienation and state-sponsored racial oppression, and the ways various actors in this theatre of the real both resist and succumb to these forces. Nevertheless, Sirc manages to pose interesting questions relating to Rap/Hip Hop and the teaching of critical literacy: "Can the academy really be a site for reform?" "What if the world as it now stands can't be made better but only undone?"

While Sirc poses these questions in passing, he also raises a fundamental question about notions of textuality and the socio-cultural-political potential of popular music and culture within students' own lived experiences beyond the composition classroom. He suggests that uses of Rap/Hip Hop in college composition should extend beyond stimulating "lively fifty-minute discussions,"

but never addresses the issue in depth. Sirc instead identifies his job a teacher as "working to provide a context for this sort of heartfelt pensive," not to "take a stand or fix a problem, but simply to reflect on possibility, to chronicle changes, just changing and having the chance to change." In other words, composition has little or no place to move students to any sort of action, or into any sort of possibility, or any meaningful engagement in the world in which we live. This position stands in stark contrast to both critical literacy and Hip Hop Culture itself. Hip Hop, or at least Sirc's reading of it, is used in lieu of punk music to keep "diverse" student writers from getting bored with dated punk music. It also serves to reinforce Sirc's a priori argument that when it comes to popular culture, nothing is worth changing or fighting for in college composition.

Danger in the "Contact Zones:" Tokenism and Trivialization in Hip Hop Pedagogy

Sirc's use of so-called gangsta rap demonstrates two contradictory tendencies in Hip Hop pedagogy, challenging established academic discourse and reinforcing exclusionary notions of language and culture prevalent in Western society. As Johnson (1994) and Jackson (2001) observe, incorporating Rap/Hip Hop into language pedagogy challenges standardized academic discourses students are expected to assimilate in college composition. At the same time, introducing Rap/Hip Hop uncritically – as either a "fun" exercise or as a convenient tool for inculcating students into discourses of domination subverts both the pedagogical and political potential of Black youths rhetorical and cultural production. In "Participatory Rhetoric and the Teacher as Racial/Gendered Subject" (Johnson, 1994) offered an early warning about compositionists'

attempt to interpret Hip Hop within limited, Anglo-Western frameworks. She observes that

> Despite the attempts of some purists, language refuses to stand still-preferring to be-bop or hip-hop within its own semantic possibilities. Nevertheless, just as sociolinguists such as Labov and Smitherman have alerted us to the ways in which attitudes about language can determine our perception of racial difference, readers who encounter a racially, culturally, or linguistically different text may read their perceptions of these differences into the text, manipulating the language to conform to their culturally learned assumptions. (p. 345)

Concerns about instructors' limited background knowledge about Hip Hop, and the potential to superimpose a priori, mainstream "readings" of Black youth rhetoric and cultural practices are shared by Jackson, Michel, Sheridan, and Stumpf in "Making Connections in the Contact Zones: Towards a Critical Praxis of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture" (2001). Refering to Lester Faigley's comparison of Ice T's protest song "Freedom of Speech" to Jeffersonian topos, Jackson *et al.* warn that such comparisons risks a kind of tokenism that reinforces "the high/low culture hierarchy, reinforcing the marginalization of rap even as it (on a superficial level) tries to act against that marginalization" (p. 24). To avoid inadvertent tokenism and misappropriation, the authors call for considerations of "discursive agency" in Hip Hop pedagogy that moves beyond treating Black music and youth popular culture as "literary" texts that students

consume and interpret "but are never authorized to create themselves" (Jackson *et.al.* 2001, p. 26, referring to Miller 1993, p. 94). They reject "the practice of textual consumerism, with rap texts substituted for Shakespeare," instead calling for teachers to facilitate the development of discursive agents--individuals authorized and able to use a wide variety of discourses as they negotiate cultural transactions" (p. 26).

New Literacy Studies and Hip Hop Pedagogy

Such considerations of discursive agency recall more critical approaches to Hip Hop pedagogy reflected in New Literacy Studies. Concerned less with literacy as a matter of skills acquisition, New Literacy Studies identifies literacy as social practice. This includes recognizing that conceptions of literacy vary with social, political, and historical contexts, and "the ways such contexts for literacy are shaped by existing power relations, asking 'whose literacies' are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant" (Street). In this way, Rap/Hip Hop becomes more than interesting popular cultural practices but rather a form of literacy, the ways that Black and other marginalized youth compose identity and resistance within dominant structures of power and control.

Morrell and Collatos (2002) locate Rap/Hip Hop within Freirean critical literacy, as they construct curricula and organize writing instruction aimed at interrogating issues of power, race, class, and sex within Rap music and Hip Hop Culture itself. They make strides in this area by not only allowing students to use Rap/Hip Hop as a means and object of critique, but also by allowing students to produce their own Rap-poetry as celebration and social critique. In addition to

contrastive approaches, placing themes found in Rap lyrics in relation to similar themes found in canonical literature, allowing students to become producers of culture, vs. consumers, opens up spaces for critical thinking and social agency. Morrell's work with the Education, Access, and Democracy in L.A. project also illustrates the ways Rap/Hip Hop can be used to combine literacy instruction with community activism. Tangible teaching strategies are offered using Rap/Hip Hop to move beyond theoretical musings to achieve the institutional and progressive objectives of contemporary language arts classrooms.

Jabari Mahari, in *Shooting for Excellence: African American and Youth Culture in New Century Schools* (1998), turns to Freire, Bakhtin, Vygotsky, Street, and Gee to justify introducing Hip Hop literacies (Richardson, 2006) in the composition classroom. Despite working within the New Literacy Studies paradigm, Mahari inadvertently engages in the same exclusionary practices as some of his more traditional predecessors by avoiding incorporating the actual music into the instruction itself. Mahari reports that

> Our research for the study showed that there was so much being written about the artists, issues, aesthetics, performances, etc. of rap music and culture, that the entire intervention could be based on this overwhelming body of text-based material *without necessarily using actual rap songs and videos in the classes.* The hypothesis was that these texts could be used as a bridge to give explicit models and motivation for students to further develop critical thinking and writing skills. [Italics mine] (p. 120)

In the face of all the theory he cites as supporting the inclusion of what Susan Miller calls "unauthorized texts" – those texts that students are expected to consume but never produce within the "official" space of the writing classroom – Mahari excludes the very discursive practice that he argues is so valuable in production in Black and global youth popular culture. He substitutes substance with passive, expressivistic "sensitivity" and "awareness" as he explains further:

> *I am not advocating that teachers attempt to significantly incorporate pop culture pedagogy into schools.* Pop culture works in young people's lives in context-specific ways that often could not be reproduced in the context of school. Rather I am suggesting that teachers continue to become more *aware* of the motives and methods of youth engagement in pop culture in terms of why and how such engagement connects to students' personal identifications, their need to construct meanings, and their pursuit of pleasures and personal power. [Italics mine] (p. 121 – 122)

Mahari's valuation of Rap/Hip Hop as an important social literacy is undermined by its exclusion from his writing pedagogy. Such contradictory treatment of Black youth rhetorical and cultural production collapses into tokenizing treatment of Rap/Hip Hop, reduced to a useful tool for enhancing Black students' positive attitudes towards standard curricula and functional approaches to literacy pedagogy. It stands to reason, however, that if one of the goals is to improve students' attitude toward their own language and culture -- to value it as a source of meaning-making and critical thinking in students' own lives -- one would have to include this language and culture within composition pedagogy itself.

Critical approaches to Rap/Hip Hop in composition are not automatically ensured, however, with its mere inclusion alone. Excess devotion to certain traditional academic interpretative frameworks risks trivializing approaches to Hip Hop pedagogy, as in Jeff Rice's "The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine: Hip Hop Pedagogy as Composition" (2003). Rice incorporates Hip Hop as "an alternative invention strategy for research-based argumentative writing" through the term "whatever," which he considers a common trope in Rap lyrics. He turns to Aristotle, Toulmin, Ulmer, Derrida, Serres, Cage, and Barthes to find the performance of Hip hop much like teaching research-based argumentation. This process is marked by "cutting" and pasting "whatever" material available for one's own rhetorical purposes. Like Mahari, Rice considers Rap/Hip Hop a blank slate, a *tabula rasa* for "whatever" the composition instructor wishes to incorporate into writing pedagogy. Rap/Hip Hop is, paradoxically, a valuable textual practice worthy of including in composition instruction that is – in Rice's formulation – devoid of significant textual meaning. He claims that "*Whatever* is best understood as a popular everyday term used heavily by youth culture when an experience or reaction can't be named. The response, 'whatever' evokes not so much a lack of response but either a sense that something has eluded the meaning of the response or of defiance, dismissal, and oppression. 'Whateva Man'" (Rice 2003, p. 455).

Indeed. Rice's reading is a severe misreading of a common African American English expression in Rap/Hip Hop. "Whatever" means the exact opposite of Rice's interpretation. "Whatever" – even in Rice's own quoting of

Redman and Busta Rhymes – does not mean that the Rapper is confronted with a moment that he cannot articulate in words. To the contrary, "whatever, man" means being "down for whatever," in fact, inviting and ready for any and everything, open to infinite possibilities. To come to Rice's conclusion, readings would have to ignore the barrage of clear social-political rhetoric constructed in one of his own selected examples of "whatever," by Digable Planets. Quoted at length, "Agent 7" invalidates Rice's claim that "whatever" represents a moment of inarticulateness, but rather outright U.S.-style urban revolutionary guerrilla warfare:

> Check it out
>
> In the year of '89 I stole back my black mind
>
> Found peace up in the east I shine
>
> One time blind I refined, then over time
>
> I realized the creamy spy gots to climb
>
> Find the spot in this land of uncle sam
>
> Focus my thoughts and be that true black man that I am
>
> I stand in the face of oppression
>
> With my sisters and my brothers no slippin' no half steppin'
>
> The five percent nation is my representation
>
> I wear Timberlands study in Timbuktu
>
> Won't rest until they free our brother Mumia-Abu
>
> Now can you feel it (huh) nothing can save ya
>
> For this is the season of our self saviour

Is younger than guerillas

Sparks the revolution black tactics, *whatever.* [Italics mine] (Digable Planets, "Agent 7," *Blowout Comb* 1994)

Rice's performance of a sort of post-modernist, fragmented reading of convenience leads to a decontextualized (mis)reading of Hip Hop literacy, obfuscating the performance of what Umberto Eco called "semiotic guerrilla warfare," which was incidentally, one of the major analytic frameworks for the present study. Beyond this misreading, "The 1963 Hop-Hip Machine: Hip Hop Pedagogy as Composition" raises important questions concerning the epistemic and political consequences of using critical theory to make meaning of Rap music and Hip Hop Culture. Rice's "whatever" thesis – that this term marks a moment of in-articulation – when the very lyrics make it plain the intended meaning "We see what's happenin'/We might start bustin'/We'll spell it out for you/If you talk, it live it."

Following this directive from Digable Planets, the proceeding chapter provides the major theoretical framework and pedagogical/political suppositions that inform the current research project. It identifies Rap, Hip Hop, and other forms of Black rhetorical and cultural production as African American rhetoric, defined by Keith Gilyard as the "discourses [that] have been the major means by which people of African descent in the American colonies and subsequent republic have asserted their collective humanity in the face of an enduring White supremacy and tried to persuade, cajole, and gain acceptance for ideas relative to Black survival and black liberation" (Gilyard 1999, p. 1). In its performance of

agitation and resistance, African American rhetoric (including Rap/Hip Hop) constitutes a "sociolect" – a common language and mechanism for stimulating class consciousness for oppressed and exploited groups struggling for survival (Smitherman 1989) within the current epoch of disaster capitalism (Kline 2007).

When viewed as African American rhetoric, then, Rap/Hip Hop is liberated from functionalist approaches to literacy that characterizes much of the scholarship examined in this literature review. It instead situates Black youth rhetorical and cultural production in the realm of critical literacy, a cross cultural lingua franca for Black and Third World youth engaged in "structural theorizing" (Molstern 1998) and transforming unjust racial-social-political-economic structures responsible for reproducing catastrophic material conditions in which they live. In the performance of these functions Rap/Hip Hop not only executes basic objectives of Freirean conceptions of critical literacy – from stimulating dialectical critical thinking and building class consciousness – but also constitutes "semiotic guerrilla warfare" waged by marginalized youth against capitalist exploitation and oppression.

Rap/Hip Hop, in this way, is valuable as more than a useful tool for instilling a functional literacy, but instead represents an insurrectionary act that makes African American rhetoric and culture meaningful within daily and collective struggles for liberation. This critical perspective on Rap/Hip Hop provided the theoretical basis for the current critical ethnographic study, which sought to understand students' engagement with various forms of Black rhetorical and cultural production in college composition and beyond.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Critical theory is radical, humanistic, and emancipatory and based on reason. -- Keith Sullivan (2000)

And even after all my logic and my theory/
I add a "motherfucker" so you ig'nant niggaz hear me
Lauryn Hill/The Fugees, "Zealots," *The Score* (1996)

The theoretical framework for this project consisted of conceptions of language and literacy that recognize the central role of Black Language and Culture in engaging and transforming unjust structures of capitalist exploitation. The underlying supposition guiding this project is that the crisis of structural racism (the New Racial Domain) persists in the 21st century because racism remains a valuable element – both economically and socially – in the functioning of liberal capitalist democracy. Its rugged endurance into the new millennium is due in great measure to not only its institutional, but more so its rhetorical/discursive form, which appears as a natural part of popular culture and the regular functioning of American society. Therefore, more critical approaches are needed to disrupt both institutionalized and rhetorical/discursive structures of racial oppression and domination.

Language and Racial Consciousness

Frantz Fanon provides a useful basis for thinking about the relationship between language and liberation. Fanon, as would Smitherman and Raymond Williams, identified language's essential role in maintaining European imperialist subjugation and exploitation of African people. This subjugation consisted of both economic exploitation and psychological degradation, with both of these conditions necessary for the maintenance of asymmetrical power relations between Black and White. According to Fanon, language has been central in maintaining this arrangement. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Fanon sees the process of colonization and alienation as starting with the imposition of the colonialists' language on the natives. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon begins to formulate a theory of language that would raise racial and class consciousness in Africa's struggle against European colonization. Having identified the relationship between language and ideology, Fanon reveals the ways the colonialist uses its violent control over the means of production and ideological reproduction on African soil to superimpose its language – and hence, its ideology and culture – upon the indigenous ideology and culture of the colonized. The oppressed becomes passive in the face of domination by accepting as its own the cultural identity of the oppressor; colonized subjects become alienated from the value of both the native cultural identity and the value of the labor extracted by the colonial power. To counter this process of subjugation and exploitation, Fanon developed a theory of language advocating African and other Third World subjects embrace their native language (and thus cultural identity) as a fundamental unifying step towards anti-colonial struggle.

Fanon's theory of language in *The Wretched of the Earth* is relevant to the current study in its attention to the intrinsically racial component of capitalism/imperialism, as well as the associated racial and cultural rhetoric that buttresses this relationship, that is usually minimized by more orthodox Marxist-oriented theorists of literacy and pedagogy (McLaren, 2005). As Fontenot observes, Fanon, a revolutionary Marxist and clinical psychiatrist, saw the need for racial consciousness to supersede class consciousness, since the "racial aspect of colonialism subsumes class considerations and makes the problem larger than envisioned in a strict Marxist analysis" (1979, p. 21). This problem began, for Fanon, when the colonial power used its dominant control over the means of production (and ideological reproduction, such as schools, religious institutions, and literacy pedagogy) to superimpose its language and cultural norms upon oppressed, Third World people. Language in Fanon's formulation is not a simple arbiter of meaning; rather, language – any language – is inextricably connected to the identity, culture, ideology, and worldview of another/an "Other." He says that "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language...to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to assume the weight of a civilization" (Fanon 1967, p. 17). To impose a colonial language on a Black person, then, is to force a rejection of not only the indigenous language but the indigenous identity, culture, world, and – in essence – humanity of the colonial subject. Thus de-humanized through language, the colonial subject is ripe for colonial capitalist

exploitation of labor and natural resources, which is the basic situation required by capitalism and imperialism to perform its work.

In the struggle to disrupt this arrangement, Third World subjects' mastery of the colonial language provides no quarter. As Fontenot observes, "mastery of language does not always mean full access to the culture of that language, especially when a basis for discrimination is color differentiation" (1979, p. 25). In this way, Black people's engagement with language and literacy becomes paradoxical, as it serves to colonize and humanize at the same time. Language creates inferiority complexes in black people and is at the same time, for Fanon, the most direct means of Black liberation.

Fanon proposed an escape from what Fredric Jameson latter called the "prison house of language" (1972) through his theory of language that called for African colonized subject to embrace of Black Language to counter the debilitating disassociations that follow when the colonized subject embraces a language other than his/her own. He observes that "Every dialect is a way of thinking...And the fact that the newly returned Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation" (Fanon 1967, p. 25). To counter Black alienation from both labor and him/her self, the colonized subject must return to the language of their own culture. Fanon argues that the oppressed need a language to help them see that colonialists have intentionally sought to close their culture, so that the native culture reflects the colonial world.

Language and Class Consciousness

Merely rejecting colonial discourse in favor of native tongues does not guarantee the formation of racial and class-consciousness. As Raymond Williams contends in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) that such consciousness does not exist a priori, but rather within a dialectic conception of language as social action. Like Fanon, Williams sees language not as arbitrary signs into which meaning is inserted/interpolated, nor representative of concrete material reality, but rather constituting an active process of exchange between the sign, the context in which it appears, and the audience that provides its meaning according to shared prior readings of the world in which they live. Volosinov provides Williams with a view of language similar to Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading. Meaning (consciousness) is not found within the sign/signifier/text itself, but is a product of a dialectic exchange between the sign/text, interlocutors, and social-political-economic contexts within which this exchange takes place (Williams 1977, p. 36). Williams points to the *performance* of language as social activity as the mechanism of consciousness itself. He turns to Volosinov, who contended that "consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse" (Volosinov1926, p. 13, quoted in Williams 1978, p. 36). In this way, consciousness – as a product of language as social action – exists not simply in the minds of individuals but is a part of the material world. As Williams argues

> signification, the social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs, is then a practical material activity; it is indeed, literally, a means of

> production... It is...at once a distinctive material process – the making of *signs* – and, in the central quality of its distinctiveness as practical consciousness, is involved from the beginning in all other human social and material activity. (p. 38)

Meaning, then, is constructed through language as social action, dependent upon a social relationship between sign, audiences, and particular social-political-historical contexts.

Williams sees this dialogic exchange as conceptual to Marxist dialectic (thesis ← → anti-thesis = synthesis) in the construction of class-consciousness. Language, in this formulation, becomes more than a matter of social relationships between individuals, but reflects historical processes that constitute the very foundation of society itself. In this way, language itself constitutes a literal means of production and therefore an essentialist terrain in the struggle against imperialism (economic, for sure, but also linguistic, racial, and cultural imperialism – which, in classical Marxist-Leninist terms [Lenin 1916], represents the highest possible form of capitalist exploitation).

This perspective of language holds significant implications for efforts to bring Hip Hop pedagogy in college composition to bear on transforming the New Racial Domain of structural inequality in late capitalist society. African Americans, internally colonized subjects five decades after the 1954 *Brown* decision, still largely segregated in most aspects of American life, lacking control over the means of production (economic, militarily, or otherwise), have in their native language a venerable weapon at their disposal –not only through

embracing African American Language as an anti-imperialist discourse, but through its active use within existing social, political, economic, and educational spheres of power and domination. As a self-consciously oppositional language to mainstream discourses, the rhetorical practices of people of African descent in America enters dialectical processes that produce "the changing of practical consciousness of human beings, in which both the evolutionary and the historical processes can be given full weight, but also within which they can be distinguished, in the complex variations of actual language use" (Williams 1977, p. 44).

African American Language as Sociolect

Both Williams' understanding of language as dialectic social action and Fanon's revolutionary theory of Black Language are synthesized in Geneva Smitherman's "'A New Way of Talkin': Language, Social Change, and Political Theory (1989). Smitherman brings a (post)Marxist perspective to bear upon U.S. linguistic imperialism, "where race, class, and sex have historically, and often successfully, been manipulated in the consolidation of power" (p. 94). Specifically, Smitherman's empirical research of African American speech communities and language practices of Black and White working class automobile factory workers in Detroit generated a grounded theory of language for social and revolutionary change. Like Fanon and Williams, Smitherman identifies the dominant role of language in "in the formation of ideology, consciousness, behavior, and social relations." This relationship underscores the

need for political and social theory to address the role of language in social change (p. 94).

Smitherman draws attention to the dialectical nature of language as social action, positing that:

> The language-speech dialectic represents habitual, systematic social behavior. Linguistic forms, embodying the world view of the society, are encoded in children in natural, developmental socialization processes...These forms construct and reproduce the society's theory of reality and become embedded in the socio-cognitive structure of speakers, who in turn use their language in spontaneous, virtually reflexive ways largely inaccessible to consciousness. (In Smitherman, 2000(a), p. 95)

The deep-structure nature of language as social action "not only reflects that theory of reality, it explains, interprets, constructs, and reproduced that reality" (Smitherman 2000(a), p. 95). This includes racial and class formations necessary for workings of capitalist exploitation of labor. Thus, Smitherman contends that "a new way of talkin'" is needed, one that would identify language as an essential component within models for social and political change.

Smitherman's research provides a new theoretical framework for African American Language, which finds its linguistic and political-economic-social structural genesis within the U.S. capitalist enterprise of slavery:

> Black English is a product of the free labor system of the African slave trade. It arose as a result of two sets of factors: (1) the need for a *lingua franca* in the US slave community where it was the practice of slavers to

> intermingle linguistically diverse African ethnic groups so as to impede communication and hinder escape, and (2) the need for a linguistic code intelligible to slaves but unintelligible to slave masters (p. 100).

Smitherman demonstrated that Black English, while reflecting West African deep structure, also became the linguistic lingua franca for working class struggle in the U.S. industrial workplace Her surveys and interviews of Black and White workers in a Detroit auto factory revealed that Black English provided a common language across racial lines for workers' efforts to posit grievances, raise class consciousness within the factory, and organize in common struggle to transform undesirable conditions. The results of this research suggests that Black English is more than a common language for people of African descent in the U.S., but also a *sociolect*, a lingua franca of the American working class.

These three, overlapping critical theoretical frameworks from Smitherman, Williams, and Fanon explicating the relationship between language and racial and class consciousness were useful for the present study, which brought this connection to bear in critical pedagogy and ethnographic research on the language and socio-cultural-political lives of first-year freshman college writers. Smitherman provides the clearest discussion of the implications of African American rhetoric and cultural production for critical writing pedagogy, observing that

> Not only is BE [Black English] the worker's *lingua franca*, it is all US outsiders' language of choice [why you have Africans speaking US Ebonics]. The ideological function and sociolinguistic status of BE is

> reminiscent of (though not identical to) an "anti-language" (Halliday, 1976). This is a linguistic system that reinforces group solidarity and excludes the Other. It is speech characteristic of a group which is *in* but not *of* a society. As an anti-language, BE emerges as a counter-ideology; it is the language of rebellion and the symbolic expression of solidarity among the oppressed. For Whites and blacks outside the working class ..it is a language which permits progressives to commit "class suicide" by sociolinguistically reconstructing themselves. (p. 108)

As discussed in the previous chapter, existing cultural studies models in college composition incorporate African American rhetoric and culture (especially Rap/Hip Hop) that appear to reflect a critical approach to language and literacy. Such inclusion, however, has been limited to using Black Language as a proxy for inculcating (usually non-White) students in discourses of domination. The current study identifies African American rhetoric as counter-hegemonic discourses useful for raising racial and class-consciousness in college composition and moving students to socio-political action within their own social worlds.

Rap, Hip Hop and Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare

> I can take a phrase that's rarely heard.
>
> Flip it.
>
> Now it's a daily word.
>
> -- Rakim, "Follow the Leader" (1989)

Conceptions of African American rhetoric explicated by Fanon and Smitherman recall Umberto Eco's notion of "semiotic guerrilla warfare." The current project drew on such insurrectionary uses of language and literacy a the basis for critical literacy in college composition pedagogy. Semiotic guerrilla warfare provided this project with an additional theoretical category for the resistive tactics employed by subordinate groups in constructing counter-hegemonic meanings. Greenblaum (2002) uses Hebdige's interpretation of Eco's theory in her discussion of the ways that ethnographic research can reveal dominant ideologies in the composition classroom, observing that semiotic guerrilla warfare "is generally relevant for those conducting ethnographic research, and particularly important for those of us in composition and rhetoric who seek to address how these disruptions to dominant ideology get played out in the writing classroom" (p. 30 – 31).

While Greenbaulm indexes semiotic guerrilla warfare as a survival tactic similar to Gates's concept of the "the signifying monkey," I index the term in Eco's original sense: the tactical production of resistive meanings by "groups of communication guerrillas, who would restore a critical dimension to passive reception" (Eco 1967, p. 144). This view relates more closely to Smitherman's concept of African American rhetoric as sociolect – appropriating and re-appropriating existing rhetorical terrain and using it to transform existing structures of racism and exploitation within this terrain. Jim Thomas underscores the importance of such subversive rhetorical activity, noting the ability "to manipulate symbols to one's own advantage subverts 'authentic

communication' by requiring some successful messages to depend on equally successful deception or concealment of other agendas that inhibit understanding" (1991, p. 14). In this regard, African American rhetoric is concerned with not just "survival" or "negotiating" hostile discursive terrain but transforming it through radical engagement with the underlying systems of power responsible for producing it in the first place.

This is, in the end, the point behind Eco's notion of semiotic guerrilla warfare: the marginalized, the oppressed, the *wretched of the earth* who lack control over the means of production in late capitalist society engage in a revolutionizing of *meaning* (and hence consciousness) by transforming existing social-cultural-political and rhetorical terrain by appropriating and re-appropriating it for themselves against those that oppress them. With the advent of the Hip Hop revolution, we see semiotic guerrilla warfare on a global scale, especially in its dynamic ability to employ "semantic inversion" (Smitherman 1997, p. 17) to reformulate and revolutionize semiotic meaning (i.e., from radically transforming word agency from "niggers" to "niggaz"). Rap, Hip Hop, and other forms of Black rhetorical and cultural production engage in semiotic guerrilla warfare through its ability to, in Gilyard's words, "flip the script" (1996) on master narratives of domination and oppression.

For Perry Hall (1999) overcoming the failed promise of literacy entails expanding the notion of literacy itself. Through Norman Harris's reference to literacy beginning with the ability to read and write, Hall sees a graduation from decoding letters that represent information in society, to a conception of literacy

that encompasses ever-enlarging patterns of meaning. "Ultimately," Hall posits, "literacy means historical literacy, or cultural literacy—the ability to authentically locate one's self in the context of one's own history and culture" (p. 111). Invoking the vernacular writings of Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison, Harris advocates a turn toward the African American "oral/folk cultural tradition" that illuminates and transforms, rather than escapes from, "the aboriginal experiences of ancestors" (quoted in Hall 1999, p. 112). This call to turn toward the language of the people (vernacular) invokes Gates's and Baker's call for a critical theory of Black texts based on the African American vernacular tradition.

The presence of the Black vernacular tradition in texts constitutes an insurrectionary rhetoric which takes shape in the form of a surprising and interesting shared trope that emerges in both Gates's *"Race," Writing and Difference* (1986) and Hall's *In the Vineyard: Working in African American Studies* (1999) when read in juxtaposition: the Black maroon. The metaphorical use of this ambiguous figure in both texts is significant when thinking about much needed innovations in critical literacy for engaging structural racism in the New Racial Domain. Social philosopher Tommie Lee Lott provides Hall with the figure of the maroon as embodying the group of victims of what Gates, in his rebuff of Todorov's criticism, says are the implications of attitudes towards perceived racial difference. Hall describes a Black "young, 'underclass' group as twentieth-century 'maroons;' they are isolated, in pockets, from mainstream society" (p. 171). They are victims of post-industrialization, economic restructuring, deteriorating municipal services, public safety, and public education systems,

leading to "the increases in school dropouts, functional illiteracy, early parenthood, out-of-wedlock births, and long-term joblessness [that] has accumulated heavily on the shoulders, and on the aspirations, of the young maroons of our community" (p. 171).

Ironically, in "Caliban's Triple Play," Baker poses a "maroon literacy," and goes further in calling for the insertion of the Black voice into the public sphere as a "guerrilla action." Likening the deformed figure from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610), the slave/trickster figure Caliban, to "a maroon in Jamaican Hills or Nat Turner preparing his phaneric exit from the Great Dismal Swamp of the American South," Baker posits a "triple play" comprising a "supraliteracy" that has the potential to radically alter the world, "carried out within linguistic territories of the erstwhile masters, bringing forth sounds that have been taken for crude hooting, but which are, in reality, racial poetry" (1986, p. 394). Baker defines "supraliteracy" as

> the committed scholar's "vernacular" invasion and transcendence of fields of colonizing discourse in order to destroy White male hegemony—is, perhaps, a way beyond traditional dualities. What appears with supraliteracy is not a doubled frame or framing, but a triple play that changes a dualistic Western joke and opens the space for the sui generis and liberating sound of the formerly yoked. (p. 382)

The current project attempts to expand this "supraliteracy" from the realm of literary textual analysis to the terrain of critical literacy pedagogy in college composition. The insertion of the Black vernacular as a maroon or guerilla action

recalls radical paradigms of writing instruction first theorized by Freire and find their articulation in critical or cultural studies approaches to literacy pedagogy. If we are really interested in "race, writing, and the difference it makes" (to paraphrase Gates 1986, p. 1) in not just analyzing the Black condition, but changing it, critical literacy in the New Racial Domain must seek critical praxis between theory and application. Within writing theory, this can be done by exploring the application and potential impact of theory to actual people--real writers--through the medium of writing instruction. After all, it is the Black student writer, in the end, that will have to face the implications of what happens if we do not intervene: the continuation of limited opportunity, marginalization, poverty, and curtailment of basic growth and development as human beings within a civilized society. As Hall posits, these young people,

> [t]hese *maroons* could surely benefit from greater levels of literacy, in both the conventional sense and in the extended sense of cultural, or historical, literacy...[which] can also be adapted to fight against symptoms of community crisis among African Americans...adapted to settings in and outside of formal classrooms, across an array of institutional fronts, as a liberation pedagogy that mobilizes cultural literacy as a tool to address other aspects of community dysfunction. (p. 180)

From this perspective, a theory of "maroon literacy" as guerrilla action coincides not only with radical conceptions of literacy identified with Freirean critical pedagogy, but also merges with the insurgent rhetorical and cultural production

of Rap music and Hip Hop Culture. The current project sees these links as important for conceptualizing Rap and Hip Hop as more than a tool useful for assimilating marginalized students into dominant discourses of the school and workplace (Mahari, 1998; Morrell, 2004; Rice 2003). Rap and Hip Hop as a maroon literacy/guerrilla rhetoric offers a necessary shift in critical literacy's traditional epistemological center from Freire's peasant farm workers in Brazil to current catastrophic conditions produced by the inextricable twin forces of structural racism and capitalist democracy. Beyond teaching the decoding of letters, this radical conception of Hip Hop pedagogy as critical literacy would facilitate the development of literacy instruction that would invite students to appropriate language pedagogy for themselves, for their own purposes, for "reading he word and the world" – for learning to acquire and use language as a means of transforming themselves and unjust systems of power within the worlds in which they live.

Chapter 4: Method and Research Design

This research project sought to understand the ways first-year composition students made meaning of Rap/Hip Hop, African American Rhetoric, and elements of critical social theory (specifically Marxism, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminism/Womanism) within and beyond the critical writing classroom. How do students engage the critical perspectives provided by such "texts?" What is the meaning of these engagements in the context of students' own social worlds? For insight into these questions, I conducted a critical ethnography of writing, rhetoric, and critical literacy in first year college composition. Critical ethnography refers to traditional or conventional approaches to qualitative ethnographic research but with an explicit political purpose (Madison 2005, p. 5; Thomas 1993, p. 4; Bogdan and Biklen 1998, p. 21 - 22). This method was useful for the current project, which aimed to provide insight into the ways students experience theories of racial and economic justice within their own socio-cultural worlds.

In particular, Madison's focus on the performative within critical ethnography provided valuable strategies for "reading" the wide constellation of signs, symbols, interactions – and the underlying systems of power that generate them – that provided the interpretive framework for this study. Performance also can entail language practices (language as social action), thereby lending rhetorical production within meaningful contexts as useful terrain for analyzing reoccurring cultural practices of domination and resistance (Denzin 1996, Kisliuk 2000, Madison 2001, Schechner 2006). From this perspective,

Black rhetorical and cultural performance – from Rap/Hip Hop, spoken word poetry, public writing, debating, and others – provided this critical ethnography a cultural script for analyzing meaning within given socio-cultural contexts. The complex matrix of signs, symbols, and embodied actions provide the fieldworker "markings" (Bauman 1977, in Madison, 2001, p. 154) for systemic "readings" of cultural meaning.

To understand how students made meaning of the concepts, themes and texts of this first-year composition course I directed my attention to students' language use both inside and outside of official classroom contexts. This focus was well-suited to a qualitative critical ethnography approach as it sought to examine language and literacy as occurring naturally in meaningful rhetorical situations (Bogdan and Bilken 1998, p. 3; Mehan 1982, p. 140). These included the writing course, office hours, campus protests, students' homes, and other locations, thereby lending themselves to ethnographic qualitative analysis (Hymes, 1972, Mehan, 1982). Meaning, however, was not limited to writing or personal testimony that demonstrated students' awareness of "consciousness" of race, class, gender controversies. Rather, students' engagement with such subject matter was deemed potentially meaningful through their use of language to argue, confront, debate, disrupt existing rhetorical or institutional structures of power within their own social worlds. As previously discussed, students awareness or consciousness of injustice – vis-à-vis written and spoken language – does not necessarily translate or transfer into meaningful social or political engagement with such injustices that exist. The current study

sought to understand and possibly bridge this relationship between thought and action.

The study employed a wide range of observational strategies useful in examining the nature of language and learning. These included:

1). Participant-observation. As both instructor and participant-observer, I performed at least one full semester observing, interviewing, recording class sessions, and compositing field notes based on classroom observation. Recorded class sessions of large group and small group meetings provided opportunities to see the ways that students experienced classroom interaction beyond immediate observations and in-class jottings.

Video and a limited amount of audio recordings facilitated the process of converting classroom jottings into usable field notes by providing verbatim conversations and other details necessary for providing the level of "thick description" needed for robust qualitative field research (Geertz 1973).

2). Participant-observation field notes. A major source of qualitative data, field notes provided insight into the nature of student conversation, social interactions, and other meaningful activity both inside and outside the composition classroom. Field notes were constructed from classroom jottings and also from notes from student-initiated contact outside of class time. Field notes from student-initiated contact outside of class time included office hours, meeting requests from students outside of office hours, and other such invitations initiated by students beyond the immediate setting of the course itself.

As the study was interested in the ways that students experience the course outside of class time, the nature or general subject matter of conversation that occurred from student-initiated contact provided insight into the meaning students assigned to the course. This included official purposes such as conferencing class essays, clarification of assignments, but also unofficial purposes, such as student-initiated discussions about race matters, social and political issues, student sharing of personal experiences prior to class, conversations about issues related to the topic of the course in other classes, or previous educational experiences. Field notes from such contact also included contexts of students' own social worlds, such as talk with friends, family, former teachers, and others meaningful in the lives of key informants. The topics of conversation and requests for meetings outside of class time provided valuable insight into the ways students appropriated for themselves the critical engagements offered through the course.

Field notes also included student-initiated engagements with the researcher/participant-observer. Such engagements included conversations in local coffee shops and restaurants, student-created public forums, talk-ins, lectures, invitations to speak at public events and political forums, spontaneous post-classroom conversations, requests by students to meet with students outside of the course, students' homes, the researcher's home, school functions, political protests, and other such events.

3). Student-produced rhetorical and cultural artifacts. As Bogdan and Bilken (1997) observe, student-produced texts and popular cultural documents

are useful in studies where the interpretation of the viewers are a central part of the project (138-139). These items took two primary forms: 1) class rhetorical and cultural artifacts, and 2) rhetorical and cultural artifacts produced outside of class. Class rhetorical and cultural artifacts consisted of writing produced as a requirement of the course (i.e., essays), as well as non-required forms of composition, including student-initiated electronic debates and email conversations. Such class artifacts included but were not limited to assigned student essays, the dialogic journal, visual rhetoric/web page project, electronic correspondence, handouts from class presentations, articles and other information students asked to share with the class from contemporary events, student power point presentations, written reflections responding to classmates' presentations, periodic class activity reflection, and in-class writing assignments.

Rhetorical and cultural artifacts produced outside of class included forms of composition created by the student within their own social worlds, for their own purpose outside of classroom requirements. These rhetorical and cultural artifacts are meaningful because they provide insight into the ways writing and rhetoric become important outside of official classroom contexts and within students' own social world. This insight was essential to this current project because it is perhaps the most valuable canvas for interpreting the impact of the curriculum on student rhetorical production, social consciousness, and political action and general engagement with the racial, social, political, gender topics generated in the readings and class discussions.

These extra-class student-produced rhetorical and cultural artifacts included original art work composed by key informants and/or the art work or drawings of others given to participant-observer by key informants; poetry (either original or given by key informants to the researcher); music created and produced by key informants and provided to researcher; music exchanged between researcher and key informants; texts given by key informants to researcher, published essays, letters to the editor, commentary, web blogs, web sites, web essays and commentary; student-produced essays circulated on web; newspaper and web-based articles featuring key informants; notes from student meetings, email conversations and debates; and student produced pamphlets, leaflets re: protest or education/information, invitations to events. Together these student-produced rhetorical artifacts provide a wide constellation of data that holds socio-cultural meaning useful for determining the meaningfulness of the pedagogical intervention (Rap/Hip Hop, African American Rhetoric, and critical social theory) in students' literacy and social lives.

Units of analysis were identified based on the major concepts or theoretical frameworks introduced in the course (see "Course Description" below). Internal sampling decisions, which consisted of reading across the data for reoccurring patterns of themes, words, and concepts, provided sub-units or subcategories for each major unit of analysis. These units and sub-units were then organized into a coding schema chart. (See Appendix A.) Each unit of analysis was assigned an individual code (i.e., MX 1, CRT 13, BFW 22). This

coding schema was used to assign appropriate code or codes to individual pieces of data. This analysis was guided by the initial set of research questions informing the current project (i.e., how do students experience Rap/Hip Hop and critical social theory both within and outside of college composition?). The coded data was then organized to form an analytic narrative, and write-up decisions were made according to this narrative.

Course Description: "Writing: Rap, Rhetoric, and Revolution"

Key informants for this study were students enrolled in "Writing & Rhetoric: Rap, Hip Hop, and the African American Experience." I constructed and taught this course as part of the college's mandatory first-year writing program. The course focus was described as follows:

> This semester, we will explore Rap music and Hip Hop culture as an important site of racial, political, and socio-economic struggle. We will begin with this basic question: What is the potential of Rap music and Hip Hop culture as a force for bringing about social change? Since its beginnings in the South Bronx, NY, Rap and Hip Hop has provided a voice to marginalized communities to protest and transform unjust power structures responsible for their marginalization. From "The Message" of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and Public Enemy's call to "Fight to Power," to the revolutionary lyrics of dead prez and Immortal Technique, Rap/Hip Hop has provided a common language of resistance, consciousness-raising, and social-political action. Hip Hop's revolutionary message, however, has been largely absent within

"mainstream" corporate representations of the music and culture. "Bling," gangbanging, drug dealing, misogyny, and other destructive images dominate global media representation of Rap/Hip Hop. These two conflicting paradigms of Rap/Hip Hop – as a language of positive struggle against oppression versus a culture of gross consumerism, gangsterism, sexism and violence -- raises a number of critical questions about the role or responsibility of Black language, art, and culture in the struggle against domination and oppression.

As such, the focus of this class is upon rhetoric – the art of argumentation and persuasion. Our task this semester is four-fold: we will 1) explore the nature of Rap music and Hip Hop culture, its role in constructing or disrupting notions of race, class, and gender; its use for personal, political, and social transformation; 2) experiment with various forms of argumentation, constructing various individual and collective rhetorical and cultural "texts" (including academic essays, individual and group presentations, dialectic journal writing, in-class debates, poetry and/or visual art), writing in various genres or styles for multiple audiences and differing rhetorical situations; 3) develop successful writing processes while improving fluency in academic grammar in the context of our own writing; and 4) applying the aforementioned rhetorics in constructing a tangible social, political, or educational project in the campus or larger community.

Two types of mandatory readings were required for this course. The first category of readings focused on African American rhetorical and cultural production, especially Rap/Hip Hop. These included selections from Todd Boyd's *The New H.N.I.C.: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop (2003)*, *That's the Joint!: The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, edited by Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (2004), and Chuck D's *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality* (1998). Students also read *Assata: An Autobiography*, written by former Black Liberation Army leader, who also happened to be the godmother of slain Hip Hop legend, Tupac Shakur.

Audio, video, and printed lyrics from "radical" or polemic Rap/Hip Hop also served as primary "texts" for student interrogation and writing assignments. In particular, the course was structured around *Let's Get Free* (2003) by dead prez. Each song was incorporated into various classroom activity systems aimed at making critical connections between the artists' underlying theoretical grounding (African socialism, Black nationalism, and other theories of insurrection) and their readings of Rap music and Hip Hop Culture. Additionally, selections from revolutionary rapper Immortal Technique and "conscious rap" artist Common were also incorporated.

A second group of assigned readings consisted of selections in critical social theory. Broadly defined, critical social theory refers to ""a multidisciplinary knowledge base with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge" (Leonardo 2004, p. 11). Readings included Marxist-socialist theorists (Marx, Gramsci, Boggs, Althusser, Zinn), Critical Race theorists

(Delgado and Stefancic, Bell), and Black Feminist and Womanist theorists (Collins, Davis, Walker, Shakur).

Key Informants

Data collected from four key informants provided insight into the ways students from varied racial and socio-cultural backgrounds experienced such instruction. The purpose of selecting key informants or focal students was to understand students' indigenous meanings, how students themselves are interpreting events, interacting with each other, the teacher, and the pedagogical intervention itself. Key informants were identified as 1) students who consented to participate in the present study, 2) student participants who demonstrated high levels of vocal or written participation in the current study, and 3) students who saw themselves as members of the communities under observation (in this case, students enrolled in a first-year college writing course taught by the researcher of this study). The focal students or key informants selected for this study saw themselves as a group not only as participants in a freshman college writing course, but also as members of a generation of college students struggling to make meaning of turbulent racial, social, and economic conflicts that have arisen at the dawn of the 21st century. Each key informant signed the university-required consent form to participate in this study (Appendix B). Following is a description of the four key informants in the study.

Joanne

An African American female student from a large, majority Black city in the upper Midwest United States, Joanne is a prolific personal writer,

composing poetry and personal journal writing as her major pastime. In fact, I would discover later that Joanne has maintained personal journals since her childhood through the time of our class meeting. A mechanical engineering major, she plans to switch her academic focus to graduate studies in English and creative writing. Joanne came to my attention as a potential key informant immediately upon seeing her full name listed on the course roster; in a surprising coincidence, Joanne's middle name (I find out during our first interview) was given to her by her father out of reverence for one of the authors read in the course, Assata Shakur. She reported that her mother and father were active in the Civil Rights/Black Power Movements. Interestingly, Joanne was very circumspect when I asked direct questions about her parents' activism, and became more sensitive about the level of detail given to me up through the class's reading of *The Autobiography of Assata Shakur* (1989). She described being raised primarily by her mother in a working class neighborhood rapidly deteriorating from the prolonged effects of joblessness and outsourcing of industrial jobs long the staple of this formerly thriving community.

Other than avoiding inquiries into the level of her parents' activism, Joanne was open and engaging as a key informant, often writing down responses on scrap pieces of paper during interviews as if for precision and accuracy. Representation is important to her; she asked to view my transcripts of our conversations at least twice during the research period. I met Joanne in her hometown at an Afrocentric K – 8 public school, during a session of a

mentoring program for African American boys. Though a graduating senior, Joanne received permission to enroll in this first-year writing course from her academic department as an independent study course.

Martin

An African American male, Martin enrolled as a "non-traditional" student after serving four years active duty in the United States Army, with service in the Middle East. He also hails from the same predominantly Black industrial city as Joanne. Martin is a journalism major, host of an issues-oriented radio show, and is widely considered a student activist on campus. Like Joanne, Martin was not originally enrolled in the course, doing so after learning about the class's focus on Rap/Hip Hop and African American subject matter. This focus was well-suited, as Martin is also an amateur Rap artist and spoken word poet who performs locally and throughout the State.

Martin, who also belongs to a historically Black campus fraternity, often brought me into his social world through invitations to speak at fraternity events, attend rallies and protests, and or participate in a number of his campus and community initiatives aimed at raising his fellow students' consciousness levels concerning racism, the Iraq war, censorship, or other major controversies. Part of his campus activism involved disagreements with the college's faculty and staff concerning what he considered the ill-treatment of African American students both in class and student life in general. While Martin was the only Black male student in the course, my interest in him as a key informant was as much related to all of the aforementioned personal qualities as the experiences

he brought with him into the composition classroom.

Alan

The intended research subjects for this research project were African American students enrolled in first-year college composition. I did not anticipate any difficulty finding this research population. I had taught at the college for almost four years prior to this research project, and most of my classes had been evenly split between African American, Latino, and White students in the first-year writing sequence. However, the course section approved for this research project was completely White, with no African American, Latino/a, Asian, or other minority student representation. While Martin, Joanne, and two additional African American students enrolled later, the overwhelmingly White composition classroom raised basic questions concerning how such students would react to what could be considered a Black cultural studies approach to critical literacy pedagogy. Part of the major premise of this research project was that African American rhetoric – which includes cultural production such as Rap and Hip Hop – is a sociolect, stimulating race/class consciousness and facilitating transformative social action across color lines (Smitherman, 1989). In this context, insight into White key informants' experiences was useful for understanding how non-participants in Hip Hop Culture and African American Language communities experienced the course.

One such key informant was Alan, a White male student from a middle-class university town in the eastern portion of the state. Alan reported that his mother, a liberal, works as a high school guidance counselor in the inner city.

He described his father as a hardworking blue-collar worker and union representative at a local car assembly plant. Alan came to my attention as a potential key informant early in the course because of his vocal opposition to affirmative action and other liberal programs, while at the same time describing himself as being a "typical liberal." Alan was a leader in classroom conversations, willing to express controversial statements about race, class, and gender, and engaged me outside of class to continue conversations, such as during office hours, over coffee and in other settings. I discovered later that Alan is a semi-professional musician, performing locally and regionally in a rock band, and was working on his first CD at the time of this research project.

Holly

Like Alan, Holly came to my attention as a potential key informant because of her initial vocal resistance to course subject matter and her efforts to sustain such conversations with me outside of class. A self-described "conservative Democrat" at the beginning of the course, Holly is a White female from the suburbs of a major but declining industrial city in the central part of the state. Like Alan, Holly described her mother as liberal and father as conservative. A major difference, however, was her many accounts of her father – "a dark-skinned Italian born in Sicily" -- expressing extreme racist sentiment towards African Americans (i.e., referring to Blacks as "niggers" and "monkeys"). Holly introduced herself to me in a very formal way after the first day of class, and then asked if we would move away from issues related to African Americans and focus on the experiences of ethnic whites and Asians

(to which I replied, "No"). A field note taken shortly after that encounter attempts to capture this encounter:

> Post-class discussion: Holly said that she does not consider herself white, is Italian, and asked if we'll look beyond Black-and-White (syllabus mentions Irish, Italians, Jews as one-time ethnic Americans). Never checks the box "white." A "flower" person – believes that everyone is equal, talk of racism reproduces racism. Observer's Comment: does talk of genocide reproduce holocaust? Does mere talk of 9/11 reinforce anti-Americanism? If not, why does talk of race/racism get dismissed as contributing to the problem – this is hegemony at work, naturalizing and privileging some stories/(meta)narratives, disavowing and silencing others. The goal of hegemony is to silence meaningful dialogue that would lead to critical thinking and possible resistance to state-sponsored ideology. We need to talk about this more as a class.

Holly's experiences in the class, along with Alan's, became a source of interest for the current research project for anticipating student resistance to pedagogy of African American rhetoric and Hip Hop Culture. Despite objecting to some of the basic aims and discussions in the course, Holly nevertheless initiated countless conversations about the course with me, and later, peers, parents, and other associates, throughout the course of the research project.

Joanne, Martin, Alan, and Holly were selected as key informants because they are typical of the kinds of students enrolled in first-year writing courses at public U.S. colleges and universities. Each graduated from high school with at

least the minimum grade point average required for admission to a major, Research One public university. Each key informant also saw herself/himself as a member of a group, namely, students enrolled in a first-year writing course. All key informants were full-time undergraduate students, and each participant in this study completed the required university-approved consent form to participate in the present study.

Participant-Observation and the Role of Subjective Knowledge

As positionality is an important component to any field of critical inquiry, qualitative researchers have an ethical responsibility to acknowledge the role of subjective knowledge and personal experience in conducting critical ethnographic fieldwork. Critical ethnography embraces the value-laden judgments of meaning, the contingent nature of truth claims, local knowledge, and vernacular expression as invaluable components of qualitative analytic frameworks (Thomas, 1991; Madison, 2001). Acknowledging the subjective also foregrounds personal preferences, political motivations, professional biases, or other ideological "baggage" that informs the organized collection and analysis of qualitative research data.

Personal Reflection: "A New York State of Mind"

Inhale deep like the words of my breath

I never sleep, cuz sleep is the cousin of death

I lay puzzled as I backtrack to earlier times

Nothing's equivalent, to the New York State of Mind

-- Nas, "N.Y. State of Mind," *Illmatic* (1994)

The current research project is informed in part by my own lived experiences with Rap and Hip Hop growing up in Upstate New York. Born in the state capital, I spent my junior high and high school years in the economically depressed, drug-ridden city of Utica, New York. A formerly booming manufacturing and textile city located along the Hudson River, Utica, like most urban areas in Upstate New York in the 1980's, was devastated by a triumvirate of post-industrialization, Regan-era national recession, and a violent crack cocaine epidemic that even today shows few signs of abating. I grew up in Utica during a time when the deadly drug trade moved swiftly from New York City in the southern part of the state, moving up the I-87 corridor to my hometown of Albany, and then westward to Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, Niagara Falls, Buffalo, and onward through Canada to Detroit, Michigan. Along this pernicious path, crack cocaine filled the empty voids that industrial jobs once filled, destroying countless lives in already devastated communities within the Northern "Rust Belt" of silenced factories and textile mills.

The 1980's crack epidemic claimed both of my parents, consigning them to a living death of addiction, homelessness, and despair. Like most children of crack-addicted parents, I was for the most part left to raise myself along with three much younger siblings. I managed to escape the fate of most of my high school peers and cousins in my age group, the majority of whom are either drug dealers, drug addicts, in prison (the only major industry in Upstate New York), or in the grave. The mostly Black and Latino community in which I grew

up (given the racist designation of "Cornhill" by the city's Italian American political majority), remains a slum and is largely described today as an open war zone. And over the years I've often wondered why some of us survived, while most of us did not.

While this question could never be answered definitively, I am certain of the role that the militant, radical Rap music and Hip Hop culture of the mid- to late 80's played in the development of my critical consciousness. Videos on "Yo! MTV Raps" of Eric B. and Rakim and Poor Righteous Teachers introduced me to the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965). East Coast Hip Hop Culture during the mid-eighties was almost synonymous with Islam, neo-Black nationalism, and the Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earths, or "Five Percent Nation" ("Clarence 13X had New York on lock/Gods on block/Jams in the park" – Nas, "U.B.R." 2004). This led me to studying Islam and taking *shahada* (Muslim declaration of faith) when I was15-years-old. Hip Hop during this time period also provided my generation a transformative political perspective; the militant neo-Black Nationalism in Hip Hop gave many of us trapped in public housing projects and slum communities a language for critiquing the often invisible power structures responsible for our condition. The lyrical polemics of KRS-One and Public Enemy made me determined to resist falling prey to drugs, violence, and prison, and instead to "fight the powers that be." Hip Hop-inflected filmmaking by Spike Lee (*Do the Right Thing* 1989) bolstered my desire to do something – anything – to make a difference, and his *School Days* (1988) fueled my desire to pursue higher education. In short, Rap music and

Hip Hop culture saved my life.

To be clear, while I was lucky and escaped the hopelessness and deprivation of Utica, NY, most of my peers did not. So the underlying question that has always fed my interest in teaching writing and rhetoric has been, How can critical educators use radical conceptions of Rap/Hip Hop to transform students from passive subjects to critical agents in democratic society? In what ways can radical Rap/Hip Hop move students to understand and disrupt unjust structures of power that exist in the worlds in which they live?

These questions, and others, informed the construction of the present research project and the analysis of critical ethnographic data presented in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

Part I: Classroom Artifacts

The data analysis for this project was divided into two parts. The current chapter, Part 1, examines the ways that the major theoretical concepts within "Writing: Rap, Rhetoric, and Revolution" manifested within key informants' classroom compositions. This insight was important because it revealed various levels of racial and class-consciousness, which is one of the basic goals of critical literacy and pedagogy. The second half of the data analysis in Chapter 6 explored ways indices of such racial and class consciousness in student academic writing became meaningful outside of the composition classroom, within the socio-cultural worlds in which students live.

By "consciousness," I do not mean to suggest that student writing alone provides accurate insight into deep structure psychological patterns or regular habits of mind. Rather, the data analysis was guided by the supposition of language as social action, discussed earlier in Chapter 3. From this perspective, racial and class-consciousness is not simply a matter of student "awareness" of injustice and inequality. Rather, consciousness manifests itself through key informants' use of language or rhetoric for engaging structures of disempowerment within the socio-cultural worlds in which they live. So while the following analysis seeks insight into the ways key informants' indexing of Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory in composition reflects degrees of racial and class consciousness, the phenomenon under investigation

here is *language as social action* – the performance of which reflects the various ways students' critical awareness becomes meaningful in textual and socio-political engagements with structural inequality both inside and outside of the composition classroom. Put differently, language and consciousness are inextricably linked; therefore, a critical exploration of the one provides valuable insight into the nature of the other. The data analysis in both chapters 5 and 6 examines key informants' language use inside and outside of classroom contexts to understand what Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory mean for facilitating racial and class consciousness in college composition.

Part I of the data analysis here revealed that students appropriated for themselves the critical engagements provided by African American rhetoric, critical social theory, and Rap/Hip Hop. Students indexed major theoretical concepts for a variety of writing tasks to "read the word and the world;" students used these conceptual frameworks for understanding the workings of race, class, gender, ideology and power within classroom texts and wider socio-cultural contexts of their own worlds. What follows are examples representative of the most frequently reoccurring concepts based on readings of a wide constellation of coded data consisting of key informants' classroom writing tasks.

MARXIST-SOCIALIST RHETORIC: RACE AND CLASS CONFLICTS

Analytic Vignette: Guided and spontaneous conflicts arise during the second class meeting – conflicts marked by the intersecting domains of race, gender, and ideology (not in typical Marxist fashion). Holly, sitting directly at the

top of the classroom against the back wall, has been eyeing uneasily the four young African American women, who join the class for the first time. They sit protectively in the far left of the class, as close as they can to what I discover later was their first and only Black male professor in classes – like this one—filled to the brim with undifferentiated whiteness. A quick survey on the first day of class reveals, except one student from suburban Chicago, the racial and socio-economic homogeny of the students enrolled in this section of the university's mandatory first-year writing program. In the routine review of the course syllabus, with its focus on critical perspectives on race in American society, I make passing reference to the lack of racial diversity in the course to illustrate the need to talk about it. Demographics have changed slightly on day two. I attempt to break things up by having the students count off by threes and divide into groups in preparation for a game, "The Pursuit of C.R.E.AM." (from the song by Wu Tang Clan's Raekwon the Chef's "C.R.E.A.M.: Cash Rules Everything Around Me," 1996) aimed at sparking critical conversation about class division, race conflict, and asymmetrical power relations in American society. This "chip game" (as the students called it) divided students into three differing groups representing three broad social classes: upper class, middle class, and lower class. I divided different colored chips representing money unevenly to each group according to its designated "class" status. I then created various scenarios in which each "class" had to make group decisions guided by either the welfare of the entire "society" or their own narrow, group interests. The group with the most chips were allowed to create new rules (legislation) throughout the game,

with interesting but predictable results (the group with the most chips always made new "rules" that benefited itself and hurt others). At the game's conclusion, I ask the class (somewhat rhetorically), Is the game analogous to American society? Do class divisions work and become produced in the same way? Do people in power with the most "chips" have the power to create rules for everyone that only benefit their group?

This short class activity provided to students an introduction to Marxist social and literary theory, one of the major theoretical concepts for the course and analytic categories for this critical ethnographic research project. As predicted, the game generated a spirited debate about the workings of race, class, capitalism, and power relations in society. A slight majority of students came to an uneasy agreement that the class divisions, conflicts, and greedy self-interests on display in the chip game were an adequate reflection of the capitalist society in which we live. Slightly less than a third disagreed, asserting the primacy of individual choice, moral values, and reaffirming the benefits of a society based on ruthless competition; these things have been, for these students, the very cornerstones upon which the greatness of America rests. They asserted that everyone has a chance to achieve their "American dream;" those that do not should not and could not hold the structure of American society to blame, since as one student said, "racism ended a long time ago...everyone can make it, even when the chips are down."

I pushed back a little, again drawing attention to the relative homogeneity of our classroom demographics. Holly, a student of Norwegian and Italian

descent from a suburb of one of the state's few major cities, whose grandparents arrived to the U.S. shortly after WWII, raised her hand. "Where did THEY come from?!?" – she demanded, looking directly at me while pointing with outstretched arm toward the four Black female newcomers she'd been surveying restlessly earlier in the class period. A silent gasp filled the room, and the nature and intensity of the question leaves me temporarily speechless (why would she demand justification for Black female students attending the class? Why would she demand an answer from me, a Black male instructor, as to the sudden appearance of Black students in the previously all-white classroom? Why the open hostility after we just played a game where we all worked together in groups, irrespective of race?). Trying to buy time to collect my thoughts, I asked Holly for clarity, that I didn't understand the nature of her question. "You said on the first day that the class wasn't diverse at all," she reminds me. "Then (today) all of a sudden these four Black girls show up in class out of nowhere. I mean, I just want to know what's going on here?"

I explained to Holly that the four Black female students had a right to attend the course, as did she, and that late enrollments are not uncommon in college courses. Later, it dawned on me that this inquiry itself had little or nothing to do with "diversity" at all. It was a rhetorical question that inadvertently revealed the normally invisible workings of ideologies of race, class, and privilege constantly at work in the U.S. social world, including the college composition classroom. As the class exercise revealed, the writing classroom can be considered a microcosm of society as a whole and thus an important site of racial

and class conflicts. Holly's line of questioning was important because it illuminated the often hidden but nevertheless dominant values of American society in which whiteness, privilege, and class division represent the natural, common sense reality of those who live in it. The sudden appearance of Blackness within such spaces immediately disrupts this dominant narrative of racial exclusion that has and continues to constitute the foundation upon which U.S. capitalist democracy rests.

Marxist Sub-categories: Hegemony, Ideological State Apparatus, and the Race/Class Nexus (MX 2 and MX 4)

This early classroom exchange was significant because it reflected the most frequently appearing heuristic in students' writing, the Marxist concepts of hegemony and Ideological State Apparatus (Coding Schema, MX 2). Additionally, this coding sub-category often combined or overlapped with the "race/class nexus" sub-category (Coding Schema MX 4), especially in the writings of African American key informants.

Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) was an important coding category for the present study, as students' encounters with Marxist interpretations of U.S. history, race, class, and gender generated critical explorations and interrogations of their (mis)education experiences. As discussed in Chapter Three (theoretical framework), ideology and language are inextricably bound, and thus represents an essential area for critical study for critical approaches to literacy pedagogy.

As the name implies, the "race/class nexus" sub-category (MX 4), identifies the relationship between racism and capitalism – or more specifically

the ways that each element supports the reproduction of the other. The point, as articulated by Alex Taylor (2002), is that racism is not only an ideology but also an institution. From its beginning with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, to Jim Crow segregation, and new forms of structural racism in the new millennium, racism persists not only as a matter of "bad ideas" or within "human nature." Rather, racism is a structural force described by James Boggs as

> the systematized oppression by one race of another. In other words, the various forms of oppression within every sphere of social relations – economic exploitation, military subjugation, political subordination, cultural devaluation, psychological violence, sexual degradation, verbal abuse, etc. – together make up a whole interacting and developing process which operate [s] so normally and naturally and [is] so much a part of the existing institution of the society that the individuals involved are barley conscious of their operation. (from Franklin and Resnik 1973, p. 3)

This perspective was valuable for data analysis in the current study because of students' frequent, often painful confrontation with one of the most fundamental paradoxes in American liberal democracy: the liberal institutions venerated as cornerstones of freedom and equality are the same institutions that systematized slavery and racial apartheid for most of this country's history. While Critical Race Theory, another of the major coding categories in this study, discusses this paradoxical nature of liberal democracy in depth, the race/class nexus sub-category situates racism more squarely within the realm of U.S. political economy. It not only disrupts liberal notions of racism as a matter of cultural

ignorance or miseducation, the race/class nexus suggests in ways CRT does not proposed courses of action to disrupt this destructive relationship (i.e., replacing capitalist democracy with social democracy).

Both hegemony/ideological state apparatus (MX 2) and race/class nexus (MX 4) appeared frequently across the data analyzed. For example, one of the key informants, Joanne, used the personal essay to explore "white-ness" as a form of hegemonic domination in her own life and others. The focus of the essay was "American-ness," tasking each student to describe the various personal, social, cultural, educational experiences/encounters that helped to shape her or his own, individual perspectives on the meaning of this oft used but seldom interrogated term (in the public sphere). No outside sources were to be used, and students were challenged with writing from an individual, personal perspective, avoiding plural personal pronouns (colonizing "we"). The underlying purpose of the assignment was for students to explore the workings of ideology within their own life, not define some objective, a prioi definition of American-nes itself. Joanne begins with the word "white" and then moves this word to a reading of her world experiences:

Slushy Snow

> A white person is as white as snow, snow on a Sunday morning with a bright sun blinding clouds into shapes of Mickey Mouse and a shark eating Jonah. People admire the heaven sent snow from above that freshly hits streets and covers trees to promote an all white city. Pure, clean and without blemish. Lining up in their Sunday best, people from all over town

are ready for what the morning church service shall bring. In their desire to hear from God, they miss their trudge, grudge, and footprints in the snow. That beautiful winter wonderland is no more and now is just *slushy snow*.

Joanne's simile provides an insight into what she sees as the ideology or worldview of White people themselves: "Pure, clean and without blemish." The material reality of this "Pure, clean and without blemish" White worldview is challenged by her rival metaphor, "slushy snow," which describes the destructive but unacknowledged consequences of the "blinding clouds" of Whiteness. The imagery serves a prelude to her more explicit critique of Whiteness as "hegemonic:"

> Turning on the television to a channel that's not BET all I see is white faces. No Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, or Cubans, just white people. On my way to class I only see ten or less minorities. Realizing this very fact makes me a little disturbed but never fearful of all this *whiteness*. Yet, is whiteness a bad thing, is it really the devil? Not necessarily. It is that *unconscious hegemonic state of whiteness* that eludes my eyes to see minority faces a few times a day.

Joanne's direct reference to Gramsci's conception of hegemony (MX 2) overlaps with the "race/class nexus" sub-category. Her reference to media (BET) also indexes Allthusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus. The hegemonic power of Whiteness is related to issues of ideological and cultural production, such as television. The power of Whiteness, in Joanne's formulation,

lies in its ability to naturalize itself "that *unconscious hegemonic state of whiteness*" and exclude the experiences, history, and contributions of Blacks:

> It is whiteness that had the earliest advantage to legislate laws that call Africans, of great civilizations, priceless arts, and beautiful culture, barbarians. It's this whiteness that assures Bill Gates in his invention of Microsoft Word to always capitalize *European* but not understand the spelling of *Assata*. Whiteness has had a sudden impact on my life; in the atmosphere of work, school, and extra-curricular activities, whiteness has downplayed my intelligence, my culture, and my talents.

The (post)Marxist concept of hegemony provides Joanne a useful lexicon for describing the destructive legacy of White supremacy – and its corollary, Black inferiority – in the context of her own lived, personal experiences:

> As an employee at *The Muskegon Chronicle* for two years I was subject to a bitter race experience. In my two years of working at *The Chronicle,* I had done all tasks with integrity and excellence. Although I was the only shade of brown in the entire newsroom I gave the place a release of tension. When I approached the new guy, Chaz from Mona Shores, the top all white school in Muskegon, I had bold eyes and a stern handshake. Jill, a beautiful girl with gray eyes and red hair, who I had been working with since I started, and who also attended Mona Shores, introduced me to Chaz. I was on my way to start the birth announcements. When suddenly and unpredictably, Jill said, "Joanne, maybe you shouldn't do the birth announcements."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"I don't think you will spell them correctly," she replied, "but Chaz can do them." Mind you Chaz had just started that day. Yet, Chaz is white so he obviously can spell. Can he spell whiteness?

In this example, as in many others, Joanne uses the term hegemony as an organizational strategy for writing about the workings of "symbolic racism," the ways that "the new racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2001) works through hegemony and subtle but potent linguistic/rhetorical codes to exclude, dehumanize, and discriminate. In this case, Joanne's non-whiteness was prima facie evidence of her incompetence – expressed through the assumption that she didn't know how to spell because of her Blackness.

Marxist subcategories: Class Analysis (MX 3), American Patriotism (MX 6) and Consumption Culture (MX A1A)

Joanne's essay is intimate, personal. She uses the personal essay as an opportunity to explore the workings of race, class, and ideology within her own, lived experiences. Holly and Alan's responses were initially more distanced, as they resisted personal perspective for what they considered more "objective" analysis. Even so, these key informants indexed Marxist concepts in significant ways. "American-ness/patriotism" (MX 6) were frequently reoccurring themes found across the data. An additional perspective unaccounted for in the coding schema appeared in Alan and Holly's essays, what could be called "consumption culture" (MX A1A). Analysis suggests that both Alan and Holly's engagement with these two concepts challenged previous thinking on the nature of American

society, capitalist democracy, U.S. education system, and the ways each of these institutions influence national and racial identity.

Holly takes an objective observer's stance in her personal essay, using it as an opportunity to critique some of the most potent symbols of consumer capitalism and what some consider American hegemony as a form of imperialism in the Third World:

> While baseball exemplifies American tradition, McDonald's is an icon of American capitalism. Every McDonald's sign reads, "Over 99 million served." The fast-food chain is everywhere. Numerous franchises in every big city, oversees, signs towering over trees in the horizon, and even in the smallest of towns. Not only is McDonald's spreading the style of American cuisine but American capitalism and culture. ...
>
> I went to one of the poorest Mexican towns, Nogales, during a mission trip, and saw more than one McDonald's. It is an American power structure, a symbol of American capitalism, and an icon of how Americans influence themselves upon other cultures. In the heart of downtown Nogales, there stands a McDonald's. It is so out of place it looked hysterical. I mean, here is this poor, struggling border town where people only make a dollar a day. People go to the bathroom in holes in the ground because they can't afford running water. Yet McDonald's stands as a defiant American entity in the midst of sheer poverty. This symbolized to me American capitalism spreading to non-American cultures, reminding the Mexicans of America's power.

Holly's commentary here alludes to multiple forms of Marxist critique. She begins with direct reference to a specific type of American capitalist modes of production, "McDonaldization." With its focus on maximizing speed and quantity over safety and quality, standardization and repetitiveness (even if destructive), and replacement of human labor with technology, McDonaldization as a means of production in an impoverished Mexican town symbolized, for Holly, a glaring example of the hegemonic power and exploitative economic arraignments between the United States and Third World countries. The latter have few resources at their disposal to resist.

Holly's understanding of productive forces, however, did not start with her encounter with Marxist theory in the critical writing classroom:

> As I learned in my sociology class in high school, I was taught how McDonald's is a model of efficient business production. The term "McDonaldization" was created to explain their extremely impersonal way of dining out. McDonaldization means a kind of style of eating, where the customer is self-serving. The customer orders the food, brings it to the table, and cleans up after him/herself. This method, driven by capitalism, provides a way to serve more people, is readily available and efficient, and always attain more money. McDonald's is symbolic of American capitalism and lifestyle of having things quick at your fingertips. It is an icon for the fast-paced, "want it now" America has developed into. Not only does McDonald's spread American culture by the food they serve, but how they conduct business.

While hegemony provides Holly with a useful vocabulary for engaging in outside/objective analysis of the ways that American domination and economic power becomes naturalized as everyday common sense, Holly's application of the Marxist framework in the context of her own, lived experience becomes much more complex. For example, Holly's critique of McDonalds as a symbol of American economic and cultural hegemony occurs in the context of a religious missionary exercise, which could itself represent another form of American cultural hegemony. More significantly, when Holly explores the workings of American ideology in the context of her own, social worlds, Marxist terminology takes on a new, inverted meaning. For example, she says that *"the reality of living in the United States...is a priceless commodity,* a place where "it is possible to choose to transcend class barriers and improve yourself by getting an education" (italics mine). Her use of direct address (which was warned against in the writing assignment and reinforced in class) suggests a desire to use the personal essay to reinforce rather than challenge "grand narratives" of American freedom and equality.

As evidence, Holly presents her mother's experience, growing up poor in rural Michigan on a farm as one of eleven children. Never encouraged to go to college or even participate in extracurricular activities, her mother was further discouraged by what Holly observes as "class prejudice that comes from people with more money and because of this pain she knew that she did not want to be poor all her life." This situation was enough to motivate her to go to college, resist college men who disrespected her "because she was a pretty and fun girl

they just assumed she wanted more at the end of the night than just a kiss," and through the hardship acquired an accounting degree and is now a CPA with a six-figure income. This leads Holly to conclude that "[t]o me there is no excuse for someone to not make something of their life and I do not think that it is fair to say that poor people do not know anything but poverty so they can not get a job and go to college because my mom is living proof that it is completely possible. I feel that being American is seeing these possibilities and capitalizing on them in the way my mom did."

Holly takes the Marxist theory used earlier to critique American capitalism in Mexico and flips it literally on its head. She demonstrates a conceptual and political push-pull, lambasting the workings of capitalism in the lives of Third World people she hoped to save through her missionary work, while at the same time embracing American capitalism in the context of her own life. Poor non-white people outside of the U.S. are victims of capitalist symbols and means of production (i.e., "McDonaldization"), while poor people living in the United States are afforded through it unlimited opportunity and therefore have no reason or excuse for being poor.

Marxist subcategory: Americanism/Patriotism (MX 6)

While not a Marxist concept, the subcategory "American-ness/Patriotism" (MX 6) was added because it represents a commonly reoccurring theme that emerged from readings of the data. It was added under the Marxist category because students' usage of this term resembled MX 2, "hegemony/ideological state apparatus." In other words, American-ness/patriotism represented a

particular kind of hegemony that became meaningful within student writings in significant ways. Alan, for example, describes "an American" as "someone who is big and proud, wearing red, white, and blue. His chest is puffed out and he is ready to fight any bad guy that comes his way." He goes on to say in "that sense, 'American-ness' to me is being proud of your country, and ready to fight for them when called." He remembers the first time he felt this patriotic fervor, while in high school during football practice:

> It was a Friday afternoon and the varsity team was getting ready to play their game. As we were lining up to hike the ball, the National Anthem started to play. I don't think, in my lifetime, I've ever felt as patriotic as I did at that moment. It felt like red, white, and blue blood was flowing through my veins and I was ready to go to battle and fight for my country. All of my teammates felt the same way I did as we discussed it later that day in the locker room. Looking back, it's no surprise we felt the way that we did. Before every major sports event everyone is asked to join in the singing of the National Anthem, linking sports and patriotism.

Alan goes on to discuss the cultural heritage that accompanies such feelings of national pride, such as the Fourth of July celebration, family outings, fireworks, and sports activities associated with it. He says that "Americans celebrate the Fourth of July as Independence Day because we are proud. We are proud that we fought and gained our freedom, and now we have this incredible family tradition that for some represents the essential "American" holiday." "Proud," "ready to fight," "red, white, and blue in my blood" – these

words, while always at the center of (White) America's lexicon about itself, gained renewed vigor after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. reflect a sense of avid American nationalism that has intensified tremendously since 9/11. While not a Marxist concept, Americanism defined as White nationalism represents a particular iteration of cultural and political hegemony that silences critical interrogation, questioning of American policy, and supports – either overtly or inadvertently – dubious efforts to export "democracy" defined as capitalism and imperialism to the vulnerable Third World.

Fighting "the bad guy" takes on a different meaning for Martin, an African American male, who also happens to be a former U.S soldier who actually performed this fighting in the Iraq theatre against "bad guys when called." The current fight for freedom and democracy, for Martin, is not located in far off foreign lands. Martin turns to the rhetoric and poetics of Rap music and Hip Hop culture to demonstrate how the struggle for "freedom" begins not with "bad guys" across the seas but here at home, within the United States itself. Quoting what is classically considered the first Rap polemic or "Conscious Hip hop," Martin indexes Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message:"

Bill collectors they ring my phone
And scare my wife when I'm not home
Got a bum education, double-digit inflation
Can't take the train to the job, there's a strike at the station
Neon King Kong standin' on my back
Can't stop to turn around, broke my sacroiliac

Midrange, migrained, cancered membrane

Sometimes I think I'm going insane, I swear I might hijack a plane!

The Message (Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five 1982)

Martin begins his reflection on American-ness in dramatic fashion, *en medias res*, "...And then it happened. Until the moment this song dropped, rap had been primarily about parties and/or women. This song was harder than any rap before it, and arguably the most prolific rap song since: *"Don't... push... me...'cause... I'm... close... to... the ...edge, I'm... tryin'... not... to... lose... my... head (uh-huh-huh-huh-HUH.) It's like a jungle sometimes/It makes me wonder/How I keep from goin' under."*

Martin rails against what he sees as the propensity of racial capitalism to commodify and de-politicize Black artistic forms, such as Rap/Hip Hop. In his view, the politics of Rap/Hip Hop provide a counter-balance to hegemonic Whiteness. Whites' engagement with Rap/Hip Hop occurs not out of respect for or appreciation of such politics, but rather as efforts to exploit the music and culture for monetary gain. He observes that "Whites have always on some level gotten their 'fix' from attempting to imitate - not *understand* - Black culture. By doing so, it is an attempt to rid themselves of the robotic, mechanical middle classes that they find themselves stuck in. Now, it has a price tag attached to it, so that other Whites can profit."

Martin, an amateur spoken-word poet, expresses concern about what he sees as the commodification and exploitation of Hip Hop culture. This Marxist concept was not included on the coding schema and was coded as "Other" (MX

A1A). As Whites control the means of cultural production, such as media and recording industries, authentic Hip Hop that carries a political message is not only silenced, but the art form is depoliticized as a whole. This was a subject often discussed in class, as students questioned whether Whites' participation in Rap/Hip Hop was authentic or mere imitation for the purpose of appearing cool. The majority of students argued that Whites could participate in meaningful ways in Hip Hop culture through complete cultural submersion, referring to famous White Rappers such as Eminem, The Beasty Boys, and 3rd Base. Martin and other Black students in the course disagreed, noting that Rap/Hip Hop was part of the Black experience. And since Whites could never experience what it means to be Black, Whites could never truly be considered genuine participants within Hip Hop Culture. At best, Whites imitated Black cultural performance, and at worse, tokenized and profited from Rap, Hip Hop, and other forms of Black artistic expression. Martin's analytic essay on Rap/Hip Hop as a force for social change reflects this position, in powerful, uncompromising terms. He indexes basic Marxist concepts such as capitalist profit motive, cultural commodification, and proletarian cultural resistance in his stinging critique of the historic pattern of Whites's appropriating and exploiting Black artistic and cultural production:

> Whites have always on some level gotten their 'fix' from attempting to imitate - not *understand* - Black culture. By doing so, it is an attempt to rid themselves of the robotic, mechanical middle class that they find themselves stuck in (Marx). Now, it has a price tag attached to it, so that other Whites can profit.

In his text, *A People's History of the United States,* Howard Zinn states that the intensity of the Black culture has always been *of the Black culture.* He states, *"it was always there in the poetry, the prose, the music, sometimes masked, sometimes unmistakably clear - the signs of a people unbeaten, waiting, hot, coiled"* (Zinn 446). Theoretically, the culture of Black America has become apart of our evolved methods of how to assess and address our issues with ourselves first and foremost, and then with White America. Once upon a time that method was the more political civil rights movement. Currently, that method is through the broad acceptance of rap music. Whites listen to Hip Hop, and many have begun to emulate its distorted media images. This, however, is ONLY an imitation. These media images are not based on an understanding of Black culture, but on stereotypes that offend without being, (in a word), *offensive.* Whites who take up the style of dressing 'black', or walking / talking 'black' are not doing this because they are a part of the enlightened few. Rather, they like the 'danger' that is representative of a 'thug.' They want more than their suburban lifestyles are willing to give.

Hip Hop culture, as does Black culture, has a seemingly instinctive will to fight. We fought for our freedom. We fought for the laws that made it illegal to discriminate based solely on race. We fight the struggle of poverty. We fight the battle of identity crisis whether we are individually aware of it or not. We've been through so much as a people, yet we're still here. We're still putting the message in our music. Whites are picking up on that

> message...the message of the proletariats. It is the message of both encouragement and heritage. He who is without heritage has fled the neighborhoods, only to check in occasionally to see "what they're up to." Then, they run back to their cul-de-sacs and imitate the stereotype of a struggle that they can never possibly understand the realities of.

Martin's extrapolation here is significant in several ways. He begins the essay with basic Marxian concepts, profit motive and references to "the proletariats." Additionally, Martin places Rap/Hip Hop within the broader context of the Black struggle for freedom and liberation through the production of Black art. Indexing Marxist historian Howard Zinn, Martin moves on to deconstruct the meaning of culture as socio-cultural practice. He then rebuffs White claims of participation in this culture by shifting from objective third person to the plural possessive pronoun "We" (referring exclusively to African Americans). Martin's analysis combines Marxist perspectives with Critical Race Theory, another major coding category for this study.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

In addition to Marxist rhetoric, various concepts from Critical Race Theory (CRT) manifested within student writing in significant ways. Critical Race Theory is an area of research that identifies the relationship between race, racism, and U.S. public policy. It shares with the "race/class nexus" sub-category (MX 4) the perspective that racism endures not as a matter of ignorance or bad habits of mind. Rather, the stubborn persistence of racial injustice is attributed to its profitability – in ways economic (in the case of capitalism), political (in the case of

public figures who rely upon racist rhetoric to garner public support), and social (in the case of working class Whites with antipathy towards their fellow working class brethren who happen to be people of Color) (Bell 1992, Delgado and Stefancic 2001). In particular, CRT's notion of interest convergence, structural inequality and "mis-education" within the American education system, appeared frequently across the data. Readings of the data also suggested that race played a part in the ways key informants engaged CRT. For Black students, CRT appears to confirm lived experiences with American racism; it simply provided another language for probing and articulating these experiences. White key informants, on the other hand, appeared to have transformative experiences with CRT perspectives. In some instances, CRT – which identifies racism not as aberrational but normal in the regular functioning of American democracy -- led key informants to confront what James Loewen called *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (1995). Zinn's popular text was especially useful in disrupting in the lives of students a hitherto unbroken narrative of White supremacy. Holly recalls:

> The fact that all the prominent figures in American History were rich, white males did seem a little suspicious me. It's not like I hadn't heard something along the lines that the "victorious get to write history any way they want to." *I knew that there was more to history that I had been learning, but I never knew that the history taught to American youth was so incredibly biased.* I never knew that Indians were treated so badly by the United States, and betrayed repeatedly for *the sole purpose of acquiring land.* "The white men do not scalp the head, but they do worse—

they poison the heart," was a comment made by Chief Black Hawk, whose people had been lied to by the U.S. Government, as well as had treaties broken several times by the United States government (Zinn 133). I never knew that Abraham Lincoln was for sending blacks out of the country, rather than integrate them into society. Lincoln "opposed slavery, but could not see blacks as equals, so a constant theme in his approach was to free the slaves and send them back to Africa" (Zinn 188). [Italics mine]

While Holly's reflection overlaps with a Marxist analysis, the most significant thing here is revisionist history. She seems surprised that she is unaware of this history, though she suspects this. Zinn does two things here. His Marxist history of America shows the relationship between racism and capitalism, and it also makes this student question the structure of her education, not only what, but also why these things were not taught.

While Alan's initial entry was full of pride and assertions he's ready to fight, by the time he encounters Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, he experiences a sort of alienation from his education. His narrative becomes two narratives:

> There are always two-sides to any story. While "American-ness" does bring out feelings of pride, and tradition, it also brings out feelings of deceit and manipulation. Up until recently I may not have felt this way, but in a short time reading Howard Zinn's book A People's History of the United States, I have developed some different opinions. As far as Christopher Columbus goes, I agree he was a great explorer, but the horrific genocide

that ensued in Hispaniola while Columbus occupied it makes me think twice about the kind of person he is. The thing that scares me the most about this incident though, is that until now, the severity of these incidents was unknown to me. I knew something happened between Columbus and the Indians, but nothing like this. It makes me wonder what else has happened in history that I only have half the story of. This also brings in a bigger issue, our nation's obsession with our image. If it became common knowledge that the man we credit for "founding America" was also known for orchestrating an incredible genocide, people may think less of our nation. If people knew...

What's significant here about his reflection is not only this history of Columbus was not known, but also his encounter with this unknown education causes him to question the nature of his education, but more. It also reflects a growing critical literacy. His first entry reflected grand narratives of White nationalism. Now, he is questioning what else is missing. He goes further than Holly by questioning the Founding Fathers, one of the other coding categories (CRT 13).

Alan eventually turns his earlier rhetoric about American patriotism on its head, flipping the script, taking the very symbols he held so dear and becomes almost sarcastic and despondent:

That remembers the men that died so I can live in a nation of liberty, and where every man is created equal. *I want to wrap myself in an American flag and lay on the ground beneath my feet, and fall asleep to the explosions in the distance.* The used car salesman side of America is the

> side that mentions the bad side, but moves away so quickly that you forget about it entirely. As Zinn pointed out in [Toni] Morrison's book, he mentions that Columbus committed mass murders, but then quickly goes on to mention all of the great things that he accomplished.
>
> He (the used car salesman) also doesn't mention the extent to which slaves were mistreated. It is, in history, blown off as something bad that happened in history, but it is in history, and not to be thought about as relevant now.

He begins a different type of engagement with these symbols, and talks about things being blown off in history, reflecting Zinn's point about burying history.

Contradictions of American Democracy (CRT A1A).

A reoccurring critical race theory theme that appeared in key informants essays, the contradictions of American democracy, was not included on the data coding schema and was labeled as "Other" (CRT A1A). Students wrote about the pernicious irony of the "Founding Fathers" establishing the United States based on principles of freedom and equality while at the same time embracing human chattel slavery and institionalized racial oppression. Alan, for example, offers a critique of liberal structures of democracy, noticing how they provide freedom to some, slavery to others. He sees the contradictions of American liberal democracy found in sacrosanct documents such as the Emancipation Proclamation and the U.S. Constitution:

> On September 22nd, 1862, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued "freeing" the slaves; actually it freed them in the north where they were

> already free. Its effects were not felt nationwide because at the time president Lincoln did not have any power to legalize anything in the South as it had already seceded from the union. That was the end of slavery...sort of. The US constitution states that slavery is legal inside federal prisons; therefore the government would incarcerate Blacks and in essence make them slaves again.

Reflecting CRT's focus on political and economic structures that reproduce racism, Alan challenges the pervasive liberal mythology of Lincoln "freeing the slaves" by pointing out that the heralded President of the Union States lacked constitutional power in the Confederate States to do so (apropos, why "civil war" was necessary in the first place). Alan's identification of the U.S. Constitution – the most sacrosanct document in American liberal democracy – as a primary source of racial oppression jumps to the modern Prison Industrial Complex. He points to the contradictory provision the 13th Amendment (Section 1), that outlaws and at the same time makes exceptions for slavery: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction [italics mine] (U.S Constitution, Amendment XIII, Sec. 1). Alan's critique is shared by Critical Race Theorists, who identify the dependent clause embedded within the 13th Amendment as one of the primary sources of the crisis of structural racism today. The Prison Industrial Complex, for Alan and Critical Race Theorists, "slavery by another name" (Hallett, 2006; Blackmon, 2008).

Joanne also uses Critical Race Theory to explore the racial contradictions of American democracy. She focuses attention on the words "freedom" and "patriotism" in the historical context of institutionalized racial oppression and exploitation:

> "America was built on the principle of freedom." America was built on the principles of murder, racism, and bondage. Through many history lessons in public schools, I have learned that America was basically built on the backs of African slaves. Even though schoolteachers present the subject of slavery in a patriotic format, my common sense leads me to believe that the ownership of slaves and freedom do not coexist.

Joanne works as a Gramscian "organic intellectual" here, drawing on her "common sense" observations and experiences as an African American woman to conclude that America's racial history of espousing the rhetoric of "freedom" and the institutionalization of chattel slavery represents a fundamental contradiction. From this common sense understanding, Joanne them moves on to critique specific public policy initiatives, such as the recent movement to ban affirmative action. She expresses dismay at attempts in the State (considered ground zero for national affirmative action battles) to ban the policy. Adding to this frustration were the actions of conservative students on campus largely considered hostile towards institutional structures created in the aftermath of the Black liberation movements to combat systemic racism on college campuses. For example, a conservative group demonstrated their opposition to affirmative

action by hosting an "Affirmative Action Bake Sale," which only sold food to White students on campus. Joanne envisions the long struggle ahead:

> [It is] a constant and frustrating battle for affirmative action's importance to be known, despite the idiocy of those who arranged an Affirmative Action bake sale to ignorantly and incorrectly portray the way Affirmative Action works. Despite the three white students I witnessed crossing out the word "save" in the phrase "Save Affirmative Action" spray painted on The Rock. And despite the crowds of people who marched in Washington, D.C to show their support for banning its use.

Joanne extends her critique to larger institutional practices of the university itself:

> But the hypocrisy does not stop here, no, it is funny how [this university] is all but too proud to suggest that its' campus is the home of equal opportunity and "zero tolerance". Yet I have been involved in several instances on this campus where nothing has been done to reinforce the suggestion of zero tolerance. Maybe I lost my faith the first time that I walked past a message board on my floor with the words "I hate niggers" scrawled on it. Or maybe it was the time that a car full of white people threw a banana at my friends and me and called us monkeys. I'm not sure when I relinquished the idea that society was completely past doing these things, but I am sure that for zero tolerance to be in effect something should have been done, but it was not.

The significance of Joanne's reflection is that it exposes the contradictions of liberal racial policies, the primary focus of CRT. Joanne points out that the same

policies created from struggle to protect the rights of Black students (affirmative action and zero tolerance policies) are the same policies constantly eliminated or ignored by universities and American democracy in general. While Joanne's experience could be identified as a prime example of symbolic racism (the use of language or other symbols as a proxy for racial discrimination), the instances of racial harassment, humiliation, and overt violence move beyond the symbolic and into the physical world.

In a discussion on White privilege, Joanne theorizes her experiences and observations with a direct reference to CRT's interest convergence:

> The implicit social and economic function of race is used for whiteness as *an interest convergence*. The conditions of minorities are historically set because they are comfortable and mean nothing to whiteness but the crutch that feeds its power. The definition of whiteness as a quality is an example of its very own interest. Whiteness as a quality has a capitalistic and master interest in producing the best traditions and culture. People *unconsciously* buy into whiteness as a quality, which serves only the best, but has killed, stolen from, and destroyed other cultures. (italics mine)

The unconscious value assigned to Whiteness becomes conscious in Holly's engagement with CRT (in conjunction with readings of Howard Zinn, whose *A People's History of the United States* illustrates the relationship between U.S. liberal institutions and the institutionalization of American racism). While Joanne's engagement with CRT provided affirmations of the racial strife she experienced as an African American woman, Holly's exploration of social

concepts that challenge liberal orthodoxy on race and democracy disrupted firmly held narratives about the nature of American democracy. In her first major writing assignment, the personal essay, Holly described American-ness as "a valuable commodity" available to all for the taking. After readings of Zinn and CRT, her perspective (at least in writing) appears to shift significantly. She reflects, in her dialogic journal entry, which becomes a forum of revelations:

> I have some hope left in me that some of this government, most of this government, stands for all the right reasons: to establish a democratic and orderly society, to give the people a chance to have their say..." These quotes brought entirely new points of view to my attention, as well as distaste for the Constitution and the structure of American democracy. I had *never* before questioned the motives of my government. I can truthfully say that for a long time, I did believe that America was superior to the rest of the world, that our ways of life should be the model for others all around the world. Now I was rethinking everything I had ever learned out of a school history book. After that section of the dialogic journal, my discontent with American democracy and desire for economic reform intensified.

Holly's testimony to her previous belief that America was a democratic society "superior to the rest of the world" that should be exported to others as "the model for others all around the world" reflects a neo-imperialist perspective shaped by various ideological forces in her social world, such as schools. Her engagement with Zinn and CRT disrupts this hegemonic worldview and stimulates a more

critical, questioning perspective. However, examining student writing alone as a measure of racial and class-consciousness is limited. Just because a student writes something doesn't necessarily make it so. More robust methods are necessary to understand how these student-produced written words become meaningful as socio-cultural action (i.e., language) in the context of their own lived experiences. The second half of this data analysis is aimed at providing this insight.

Martin departs from personal reflection to objective critique, using Marable's discussion of American structural racism to offer a more explicitly radical critique. Martin's critique is radical in the classical sense, of seeking to identify the underlying root of a critical social problem. For example, Martin writes in his dialogic journal that

> America was founded upon racism. In fact, racism predates the American identity. Even before slavery, white people were decimating indigenous populations. America was founded for white Anglo-Saxon Europeans. The fathers of the Constitution spent many hours deliberating and debating on how to form the government so that it could have a solid foundation and one that could adapt for change so that anarchy would not take hold. However, they also spent much time deliberating about how to deal with their black population. The social construction of race or the making of race as policy has been an issue since the founding. Thus, Manning Marable is right when he states "America's 'democratic' government and 'free enterprise' system are structured deliberately and specifically to

maximize Black oppression." Upon the creation of the America, individual rights were not meant for black people. In fact, because the Constitution was based upon individual rights, and black people did not have rights, it gave slaveholders the right to have ownership over the body of black human beings. Thus, blacks were denied rights and White supremacy was set as policy. This is evident in the Constitution because slave or slavery was not mentioned in it. Furthermore, the legal system is founded in racism as well. For example, because the U.S. Supreme Court based decisions upon the Constitution, which is founded upon the denial of rights to black people, they produce racist outcomes.

Martin's emphasis in his interrogation of the words "democratic" and "free enterprise" suggests contradictions between the two. In other words, the venerable documents that have been a cornerstone of American liberal democracy guaranteed slavery and oppression for Blacks. CRT seeks to illuminate this perspective so that, while offering few tangible alternatives, provides an alterative conceptual framework to prevailing liberal racial ideology. Racism is not aberrational but normal in the regular functioning of American capitalist democracy.

BLACK FEMINIST/WOMANIST THEORY

Black Feminist and Womanist theory offers critical insight into the particular experiences of Black women. Both paradigms critique mainstream (gloss: White) feminism as racially exclusionary, treating the experiences of all women as equal in the face of racial, socio-cultural, and economic differences.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, Black Feminist/Womanist theory was introduced as one of the major theoretical frameworks for the course. It provided invaluable insight into what Patricia Hill Collins calls the "interlocking systems of gender, race, and class oppression" (*Black Feminist Thought*, 1990, p. 222) work in both conventional texts (i.e. *Assata* 1989) and Hip Hop texts (i.e. Missy Elliot's "Pussycat") introduced in the course. Black Feminism and Womanism attempts to give voice to "a political agenda for Black liberation that pivoted on the emancipation of black women...collectively and individually to fashion an autonomous worldview and oppositional consciousness (Guy-Sheftal 242). For this reason, both paradigms were included as critical frameworks for the present study, but more broadly, Black Feminism/Womanism reveals the complex "matrix of domination" connecting gender with racial, sexual, economic domination and exploitation in U.S. society.

Matrix of Domination (BFW 22)

Joanne's research project reflects her Black Feminist orientation, focusing on the relationship between structural racism and crisis conditions confronting Black women today. She argues "structural racism, the matrix of domination, and the policies responsible for the material conditions of Black women in the new millennium, Black women are in crisis in three aspects: HIV/AIDS, poverty, and welfare reform." She examines the "long history of oppression from the White power structure (i.e. America), White males, White women, and Black males, we can contextualize the matrix of domination." Joanne argues that the plight of Black women in the new millennium is not just a result of their race, but their

class position as well as their gender. A dialogic journal entry provides her personal interest in this perspective:

> As a strong Black woman, it is crucial that I understand the crisis that I and my fellow Black women face. As a Black woman, it is important for me to be able to identify the face of my oppressor. The late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated: "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor it must be demanded by the oppressed.". As a Black woman I know that I suffer from what Patricia Hill Collins calls the matrix of domination. What this means is that Black women are oppressed by White men, White women, and Black men. And if they submit to this oppression – Black women end up oppressing themselves.

Standards of Beauty (BFW 25)

Standards of Beauty (BFW 25) emerged unexpectedly as a major theme that appeared across readings of the data. Additionally, this sub-category appeared to overlap or was informed by Marxist cultural theory (MX 2). From this perspective, dominant Eurocentric standards of beauty are a hegemonic force that naturalizes White supremacy and Black inferiority. Joanne reflects on both the psychological and physical violence of this devastating ideology. Reflecting Assata's Shakur's explication of the meaning of the word "Black" in her own life, Joanne takes this word and applies it in an exploration of her own. Assata recalls that being called "'Black' was grounds for fighting, never hearing the words 'Black is beautiful'...the idea never occurred to most of us (*Assata* 30). Joanne recalls how this word had a devastating impact on her world:

This goes back to slave days with field slaves and house slaves. This issue of light vs. dark and making (teaching us to) hate our beautiful Blackness. I was the darkest of all my cousins and I was constantly teased b/c of it. You sweat coffee, you sweat tea' , "chocobliss", "Blackula" I remember it all and I remember what it did to me & my self-esteem. My parents told me I was beautiful, but I thought they only said it b/c they were obligated to as loving parents. I once beat a girl down & stomped her in the face for calling me a black dog. We never got along but that was it. You could talk about my momma, but call me black & that was an immediately, guaranteed ass whippin!

Joanne's reflection in this dialogic journal entry is complex. She sees on the one hand the historic utility of hegemonic, Eurocentric standards of beauty as a means of self- and intra-racial hatred. This ideology, once individually and collectively internalized, generates destructive behavior that prevents racial and class unity against the dominating power structure whose power is predicated on racial and class divisions. This recognition, however, is not enough to circumvent the "guaranteed ass whippin" she delivers to her Black female tormentor --- a point literally underscored in the dialogic journal entry, which was underlined as an emphatic point. Joanne's reflection is tragic and powerful, suggesting a double consciousness in which Black people view the world and themselves from the disciplinary gaze of their oppressor (Du Bois, Fanon, Foucault).

"My Voice Will Be Heard" (BFW 27)

The struggle for Black women against the "matrix of domination" has been a struggle against the silencing of Black women's voices in all areas of social and political life. This was a major reoccurring theme identified in data analysis for this study, mostly mediated by key informants' personal experiences and classroom engagement with the treatment of Black women in *The Autobiography of Assata Shakur* (1987) and corporate commodification of Hip Hop Culture. A former student of mine, Jocelyn Johnson, and others conducted a "Hip Hop Workshop" for my course, moving these first-year writing students through the composition process of Rap and spoken word poetry, and connecting the creativity and writing process of those endeavors to these students' academic writing processes. Jocelyn had been a student in a remedial writing course I taught several years ago. After a few weeks of reading assessing her writing, I confronted her directly, asking her why a young freshman writer with so much writing skills ended up in my remedial writing class. Her first-year composition teacher had told her repeatedly that she could not write -- and reinforced that point in written comments on her papers. Jocelyn, an aspiring English teacher, began to believe her composition teacher's critique and acted accordingly by refusing to write. This was one of many instances in which Black students – especially Black female students – were subjected to racist treatment through the written word – symbolic racism – by composition teachers who saw the presence of Blackness in academic writing as evidence of academic or cognitive deficiency.

To move Jocelyn out of self-silencing in class and in writing, I decided to send one of her original poems that accompanied a research paper on African American English/Ebonics for publication. The poem, "The Voice" (2001), was written by this freshman writing student who had been told repeatedly by composition teachers that nothing she wrote was of value. Her poem was published by Stanford University's "Black Arts Quarterly," edited by Hip Hop sociolinguist, H. Samy Alim. In the first stanza, Jocelyn responds to years of linguistic and cultural silencing in schools, getting rhetorically "in yo face," asserting in the first stanza that

> I'm Gon be Heard!!!
> I said I'm Gon be Heard!!!
> My dialect don't reflect dis mainstream
> So called view
> But I don't care
> Cause my VOICE gon come through
> Dey say I be speakin Ebonics
> and dey can't understand
> So should I change to reflect dis dominant White man
> I was taught it cause you stripped me from my land
> Da masta told me to get da broom
> so dats all I did
> talkin to me in pidgin to get da walls clean
> no class to teach me to speak dis
> standard english thang
> so now I be speakin creole a mixed-up language not like slang
> Dat don't stop me from bein a human being
> My VOICE gon be heard (Johnson, 2001, p. 27)

Jocelyn continues to write in Ebonics about the language and culture, and then code-switches to Standard American English (SAE) in the last stanza, asserting that

> It took over 200 years, for me to reach you
> and now I must teach you
> I may speak in so called "White Terminology"
> This one thing may hold some truth
> This perspective will not stop

My VOICE from reaching everyone.
Including you. (Johnson, 2001, p. 27).

Holly connects the issue of *voice* to her readings of *Assata* and Hip Hop culture. For her, women's involvement in Rap/Hip Hop has been largely hidden, as the stories of their influence and productivity have been few. She says that "Its about time we do hear about these things. If they (women) have been instrumental in the black culture movements, I think its only fair that they get their respect. Women have been in the background for far too long." This question of voice generates introspection and self-reflection, as seen in Holly's dialogic journal entry on *Assata*:

> I will candidly admit that for a long time, I was going along with life, not questioning views and images that I should have. The outcome to this was and has been me believing a lot of things. Though I am not a politician, *I still have a voice.* Assata's use of language and writing gave her a voice. Her spelling of "Amerikkka" disrupted the notion of equality in America. Her rhetoric and love for language made it easier for her to fight against White supremacy.

Holly's reflection here identifies language as a tool for struggle against White domination and exploitation. It suggests a type of semiotic guerrilla warfare, where oppressed groups in capitalism lacking control over the means or production use their control over the means of subterranean rhetorical and cultural production as an insurrectionary act.

Hip Hop Feminism (BFW C3C)

Data analysis revealed an unexpected theme or sub-category, Hip Hop Feminism. Student writers made critical connections between two major theoretical paradigms taught in the course, Black Feminism/Womanism and Critical Hip Hop Studies, and combined them to form Hip Hop Feminism. Rachel Raimist sees Hip Hop Feminism as the various ways that women use personal narrative, essays, short stories, poetry, visual art and lyrics to consider their representation and participation within Hip Hop "on our own terms:"

> We grapple with this burden of hyper-visibility and the limited views of female rappers, queer bodies, and our participation in all elements of hip-hop culture. We push to move beyond the good girl/bad girl dichotomous frames [that] heterosexist society [uses to] divide us. We must break out of the two camps of video hoes and conscious sisters and show the complicated spaces where we exist. We are multi-ethnic, multicultural and a transnational movement of women in hip-hop. We speak our stories, paint our stories, dance our stories and channel our energies to show the world a bit more of how we do hip hop." ("B-Girls, Femcees, Graf Girls and Lady Deejays," *That's the Joint*, 2004)

Hip Hop feminism seeks to resist the bifurcated rhetoric on women in Hip Hop that identifies them as either entirely "positive" or "negative." It thereby creates space for more complex perspectives including the possibility of the "video ho" as a positive figure. Martin, while harsh in his critique of Hip Hop, which he thinks presents a "negative" influence on "positive minds," is open to the possibility:

> The flip side of the argument is.. is that women in hip hop do present a good role model for women to follow.. You have plenty of women rappers who uplift women's rights and the idea of women being queens and the right treatment to women. Artist Eve put out a song entitled "Love is Blind" on her first album, which tells a song of her friend being in an abusive relationship. It expresses that it is wrong for women to be treated with no respect. Rapper Common" put out a song on his album entitle "like Water for Chocolate" about Assata Shakur and told some of her struggles of being a black woman (BFW 23, 28, 37)

In his essay exploring whether Rap/Hip Hop is a force to move the Hip Hop Generation to positive social and political action, Martin uses his reading of *Assata* and the anti-hegemonic culture created by the Black Panther Party as a rubric for critiquing the representation of Black women in Hip Hop culture. He argues that "the role women play in hip hop is a very negative and shouldn't been taken in as something to live by for women in everyday society." He compares Nelly's infamous "Tip Drill" video, a quasi-pornographic ode to strippers that ends with the rap superstar swiping a credit card down the thong of a bikini-clad Black woman:

> The rapper along with other artist and friends are at a mansion and there are women all over the place dressed in nothing but bikinis and thongs dancing in a very provocative manner, some even getting naked. This video is so racy that it is only shown on one network (BET) and it is on a specialty video show entitled "Uncut" which is aired at two o'clock in the

> morning on weekdays. ...As you see by some the artists in the song, the basic idea that the song is giving is that the females that are seen by the artist are comparable to objects and only acknowledged if they are doing sexual acts. ....songs not only violate some of the basic principles of living set by the Black Panther party, but...In most of the videos that are shown on television you see women who Assata Shakur would say are out of touch with their true beauty. You see black women basically playing the slave to these primitive and immature acting rappers be it black, White, or Hispanic You have very little flashes of women being in charge of something or not being superficial, for the impressionable mind this is a very bad way to learn about the roles women and men play in society.

Martin's exposition here demonstrates the complexities and difficulties in challenging demeaning representations of Black women in popular culture. His outrage at the Nelly video was shared by the majority of Black women, who protested the artist and BET to remove the video from the airwaves. At the same time, Martin's reflection risks recapitulating the same Black male masculinist conceptions of Black womanhood that have proven at times to be both patronizing and sexist. He repeatedly asserts the notion of "true beauty," as if there exists one Black standard of what this means. It positions Black women by Black men not as equal agents but passive subjects – Black "Queens" – in need of Black male protection from White domination.

But even this perspective is complicated when considering (some) Black women's embrace of this perspective as empowering. Responding to Assata's

discussion of Black men's internalizing of "the White man's opinion of Black women (116), Joanne contends that

> We still deal with the same B.S. today. When will we realize that we've all we got & we need to cherish each other & hold onto each other. That's why I'm single now b/c so many men still have this outlook. I'll treat my man like the king he is, but only if I'm his queen. And if I ain't his Queen, he ain't my man * I don't need him cause I damn sure don't settle for less. I am a Black Queen & will be treated as such. NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS RULE!! PERIOD!

Joanne's constant underscoring of certain words or statements in her dialogic journal highlights a series of painful personal experiences begin devalued by fellow African American women, their White female counterparts, and Black men in particular.

After readings in Hip Hop feminism from Gwendolyn Pough, Tricia Rose, Rachel Raimist, and others, Holly posits that women's participation in such a sexist, misogynistic culture was contradictory. She wonders "If rap diminishes African American women, why do they like it? Why do they want to be a part of it?" She finds her answer in Tricia Rose's "Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile" (2004, p. 291), which makes the point that women rappers have always been respected members of the Hip Hop community. She says that

> I thought that rap diminished women, and that made it hard for any women trying to "make it" in the hip hp world. I have to believe that if this statement is true, each woman to whom this applies had to go to great

lengths. They must have had to be strong, to be prepared to be ridiculed and shot down.

Holly eventually concludes that women's participation in Hip Hop, despite the presence of degrading depictions of women, is a means of inserting their voice into the public sphere: Hip Hop "is their people's culture. It is the culture that gives African Americans a voice in a society that does not...if there is a movement for African Americans, that must include women; even if the rap part of hip hop degrades them."

Joanne is no exception, ending her analytic essay with a decidedly Womanist perspective, referring to the male rapper Common's feminist ode to the marooned figure of the Black Liberation Army leader given political asylum in Fidel Castro's Cuba:

> In 2004, I am elated to be Afrikan-Amerikan. The tests I have passed, the trials I have engaged in have made me, the 108 pounds of steel I am today. It is because of Black culture that I still stand. The music. The poetry. The literature. The dress. The hairstyle. Everything. It all belongs to us. In the words of Common:
>
> In the Spirit of God.
>
> In the Spirit of the Ancestors.
>
> In the spirit of the Black Panthers.
>
> In the Spirit of Assata Shakur.
>
> We make this movement toward freedom

For all those who have been oppressed, and all those in the struggle.

Analysis of student essays and dialogic journal writings suggest that the major theoretical perspectives guiding critical writing pedagogy in college composition became meaningful for key informants' engagement with existing structures of racial, gender, political-economic oppression and exploitation. Existing research in critical literacy and pedagogy identifies such rhetorical production as evidence of various levels of social-political-racial consciousness. However, as mentioned previously, analysis of student writing alone fails to provide robust insight into the ways these critical concepts become incorporated into the socio-cultural fabric of students' own lived experiences. The second part of the data analysis for this project presents findings from qualitative critical ethnographic field research that sought to understand the meaning of Black language, culture, and critical social theory (Marxism, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminism/Womanism) in the context of students' own social worlds.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis

Part II: Socio-Cultural Artifacts

The previous chapter established that students indexed elements of Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory for classroom writing tasks. The current chapter explores whether these themes or theories became meaningful in the context of students' own socio-cultural worlds. Qualitative critical ethnographic analysis field notes, student-produced rap lyrics, interview transcripts, and other rhetorical artifacts provided insight into ways key informants in this study experienced critical approaches to composition pedagogy beyond the official classroom setting.

For the two African American key informants in this study, the everyday realities of being Black in the United States appears to have already equipped them with the kinds of critical facilities the composition course was designed to develop in the first place. Nevertheless, the course provided affirmation and voice to previously unheard or silenced Black student perspectives. This was evident in Joanne and Martin's use of various themes and theories of resistance to insert their voice into the public sphere.

Joanne

Joanne was already a prolific writer before entering the composition classroom. She had maintained personal journals since junior high school, and shortly into the semester had completely commandeered for her own purposes the dialogic journal writing required for the course. Most of this writing, however,

was individual, personal. Nevertheless, analysis of Joanne's engagement with Black rhetoric and culture in college composition indicated that various textual encounters moved her writing from a personal to a public and political sphere. For example, Joanne moves her private, painful personal reflections on her struggles against Eurocentric/anti-Black standards of beauty into the realm of critical literacy teaching. She does this by creating a teaching session on the subject for the young men attending the mentoring program for at-risk Black males in her hometown. Joanne draws on the African American rhetorical tradition of spoken word poetry. Using an anonymous poem, "Too Black," she opens her session on visual representations of Black women in American cinema:

> They take my kindness for...weakness.
>
> They take my silence for...speechless.
>
> They consider my uniqueness...strange.
>
> They call my language...slang.
>
> They see my confidence as...conceit
>
> The see my mistake as...defeat.
>
> They consider my success.../accidental.
>
> They minimize my intelligence to...potential.
>
> My questions mean I am Unaware.
>
> My advancement is somehow unfair.
>
> To voice concern is discontentment.
>
> If I stand up for myself, I am too defensive.

If I don't trust them, I am too apprehensive.

I am defiant if I speak.

I am fake if I assimilate.

My character is constantly under attack.

Pride for my race makes me "too black."

The poem is significant when we recall Joanne's dialogic journal entry discussed in Chapter 5. There she recalls incidents in which the word "Black" was hurled at her as an insult. However, in the poem, the meaning of Black is inverted, redefining for Joanne the meaning of this word. During the mentoring session, Joanne explores different representations of Blackness presented throughout the history of African American cinema, helping her young students to understand that "Black is beautiful."

Joanne's engagement with Blackness and dominant standards of beauty in the course manifested in her artistic and rhetorical production that moved beyond her extensive dialogic journal entries and, like the mentoring session on Blackness, positioned Joanne as a teacher of critical literacy to her peers. For example, she composed and shared an original poem during a group presentation on *The Autobiography of Assata Shakur*:

Write On, Sista Assata!

i know what it is like to be expected to fail. i am Black.

i know what it is like to be called hurtful things other than my birth name. i am Black.

i know what it is like to be followed around in a store because someone think i may steal. i am Black.

i know what it is like for individuals of the European persuasion to clutch their bags and walk at a faster pace in fear of my afrikan presence. i am Black. [Italics in the original]

Joanne reproduces Assata's counter-hegemonic use of writing, such as using the singular first-person pronoun, replacing the letter "c" with "k" in the word African, and using lower case "i" for the first person pronoun. Such conventions reflect counter-hegemonic forms of African American rhetoric/language as a form of protest popular in the 1960's and '70s. Joanne appropriates these conventions from *Assata* for her own Twenty First Century commentary on Blackness.

Such textual transfers were not instances of mere mimicry. Joanne was conscious of such rhetorical decisions, and explicated them in public on several occasions. For example, during an early classroom discussion on *Assata*, several non-Black students asked why the author of the text used "k" to spell "amerika" and "amerikkka." Joanne expained that the spelling was Afrocentric--with no equivalent "c" in West African languages that form the basis of African American Language or Ebonics. Her classmates then raised questions about the nature of Afrocentrism. The usually introverted student writer uses Erykah Badu's explication of the Ankh as an example, drawing the figure on the board, passing around the class a small Ankh necklace she wears daily. In this and other ways, Joanne's personal and private reflections on Blackness were given voice through critical engagement in meaningful rhetorical situations.

Joanne's engagement with the rhetoric and poetics of Rap music and Hip Hop culture was complex. She responded in sometimes unexpected ways.

Even though she experimented with poetry, she had what I considered a conservative notion of Black Language due to her frustration over the use of the word "nigga." Joanne often railed against what she saw as irresponsible uses of language not only in Rap lyrics, but also in academic texts about Hip Hop itself. For example, in one extended interview, she expressed her anger and frustration with Todd Boyd's *The New H.N.I.C.: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (2003). Joanne said that she recognized the importance of *Assata* and Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* in discussions about racial, social, and economic justice. She admonished me, however, for incorporating Boyd because of this Hip Hop scholar's liberal use of the word "nigga." She posits that

> In the context of class, if you present a song, and they use the "n"-word, I guess I don't find that to be offensive. That's just the artist's work. But in a book, going through a long discussion...every time I read a curse word [in *The New H.N.I.C.]* I knew it was wrong. I also didn't like the fact that Boyd dismisses the ways that this word has been used throughout history to degrade us. You have to think about the people who died with that word. I had a great-great grandfather who was lynched with somebody using that word. I think our ancestors would be turning over in their grave. [I asked her if "nigga" has the same meaning as "nigger"] If you change –er and add an –a, that does not change its meaning. Because if you spell it wrong, that doesn't make it right. It's still the same. I really don't understand – the first few pages [of Boyd] I could not even read it.

Despite taking offense at Boyd's use of "nigga," Joanne embraces Black rhetorical practices in everyday speech. She says that Ebonics is part of her linguistic repertoire, that she knows how to "go back and forth" (code switch). Texts by Black female writers such as Sista Souljah (*No Disrespect*) and Joan Morgan (*Chicken Heads Come Out to Roost*) displayed that ability, which she appreciated. And despite her dislike of the "N"-word, Joanne indicated that she enjoys watching Black Entertainment Television. She said that, as an amateur spoken word poet, she tries to train herself "to listen to the beat and not the words, concentrating on the flow, how they say the words to the beat, their tones, voices, inflections, things like that."

Only on one occasion did Joanne engage in organized public protest. In the midst of one of the first interviews for this project, while talking in a local coffee shop on campus, a former student from a freshman writing course handed us a flier and implored us to join him and other Latino/Xicano students in a protest against a nearby Wal-Mart. The picket was generated by Wal-Mart's decision to sell Mt. Olive Pickles, a product harvested by California migrant farm workers toiling under slave labor conditions. These workers suffered 15 – 18 hour workdays earning less than minimum wage. They were provided little food, no health care, and endured physical violence and death at the hands of the company supervisors. My former student, now a campus activist, continued to urge us to come join the picket line in solidarity. I asked Joanne if we could cut the interview short to join the protesting students, to which she agreed.

We joined the approximately 15 students that were members of a campus Latino/Xicano organization, holding protest signs, chanting social justice slogans, and talked with passing customers about the situation. Within an hour of our arrival, a manager assured the group that the Wal-Mart chain was unaware of Mt. Olive's working conditions and agreed to take the product off the shelf. After the protest's organizers were assured that would be the case, the students held a short impromptu celebration in the parking lot and headed back to campus. What was significant here was that Joanne seemed to naturally join in this impromptu activism, without fear or intimidation. Her participation seemed to highlight critical pedagogy's imperative for teachers to help create the kinds of conditions that would allow for students to more fully participate in critical social democracy.

Martin

Giving voice to African American students' perspectives was facilitated not only by "Writing: Rap, Race, and Revolution," but also through the interaction between the teacher-researcher and key informants as well. For example, Martin, the African American male key informant, became a mentee of sorts through the interviewing process. As one of the few Black male students I had taught in college composition, Martin's academic and intellectual life became a subject of great interest for me. Over time, it seemed, the lines between teacher and student became blurred. I became a sort of a mentor to him, naturally out of our conversations about what it means to be both Black and male in the U.S. Only a few years younger than myself, Martin described himself as "a watcher,"

meaning he enjoyed observing people engaged in the ordinary business of doing things, and then writing poetry and short stories about these observations which served as inspirations. His career goal was to move to New York City to pursue graduate study in journalism, while at the same time working for a Black-owned newspaper press and writing columns about the everyday life struggles of ordinary Black people living in the city. During interviewing sessions, I often found the roles reversed, with Martin asking subtle questions that forced me to reveal my thinking and ideology to him as well.

This keen interest in understanding the consciousness of others appeared to relate to Martin's engagement with Rap/Hip Hop and critical social theory to insert a counter-hegemonic narrative into the public sphere. Martin often expressed frustration with what he considered limited, predominantly white middle class issues dominating campus, local, and national news coverage. Additionally, as both an Army veteran who grew up in the inner city, Martin was increasingly concerned with what he called "bourgeois thuggin" performed by middle class African American college students from mixed or predominantly White suburbs. The oversized clothes, the sag, the slang – all these things represented attempts by middle class African American college students to conform to stereotypical mass-media produced notions of Blackness. During a lunchtime conversation, Martin shared with me his experience watching freshman students from [a major urban area] enter college as "clean-cut" freshmen but quickly "thug out" in the course of a semester. Martin is incredulous, exclaiming "I was like, What-tha-fuck? Kids on the honor roll in high

school come to [college] asking about, Yo! You wanna get this weed? A lot of these black college students from middle class backgrounds pretend they're thugs because many haven't had a chance to explore, who am I?"

As a slightly older student, Martin expressed a sense of personal responsibility for raising the racial and social consciousness of his undergraduate peers. He recalls "Black excellence is not taught any more; everybody is out for self, like 'it's my money, I'm all about me, I'm doing this college thang.' I had to tell one of these middle class thugs that hey, 'You're not a thug...you're a COLLEGE STUDENT...you ain't no pimp, you a math major...don't get it twisted!" [laughter]. In this and many other instances, Martin saw his role as speaking the truth to fellow students to correct misguided notions of Blackness and Black male masculinity.

Rap, Hip Hop, and the Repressive State Apparatus

Language, for Martin, offers critical opportunities to redefine and resist existing repressive social structures. This became evident during class discussions of political or polemic Hip Hop such as dead prez. After one class session, Martin asked for my feedback on rap lyrics he penned shortly after his discharge from the military. The song, called "Survivor," resembled "Jesus Walks" by Kanye West. It begins with an ode to Christian soldiers:

> As soldiers in this Christian army, we gotta realize that we still gone have battles with the enemy...Our advantage is now we fighting with power of God within us.

The lyrics go on to weave together a story of short jail terms, police harassment ("I see I can't be my color out of the D/now I'm back in the D/cause yall can't get the color out of me, ha"). The song then moves on to detail various structural forces limiting the life chances of African American males:

> What they trying to do is take way our license for good/so we can go no further than the hood. Now that they got they plan for keeping us rapped in the hood/hey gone make us kill ourselves by putting crack in the hood. Then they inflate the price of they tickets something ridiculous, so if you lose your license you ain't even trying to get it. And try to keep us in these hoods where we stay at, right? That means they plotting death or jail, cus if I don't get suspended L's [drivers license], I'm a lose freedom for a crack sale...I become the state's property.

Martin uses "Survivor" to reveal various Repressive State Apparatuses targeting young African American males: racial profiling, the court system, and the prison industrial complex. Put simply, the hood is constructed as a trap, limiting Black mobility and access to alternative space; "the D" in Martin's view represents a prison without bars, the goal of which is to make Black males the physical (and perhaps economic) "state property." Martin penned these lyrics as an act of symbolic resistance, seeing himself engaged in "Fighting a war that I can't win, still I survive. So thru my rhymes, I spill out my life."

I ask Martin for permission to share "Survivor" with the class, and connect the major themes to our discussion of Althusser's notion of Repressive State Apparatus (RSAs, which refers to social institutions of power that employ overt

uses or threats of violence to enforce state power) and Ideological State Apparatus (ISAs, which refers to ideological systems in society used by the state to maintain its hegemony, such as media, schools, and religious institutions). After explicating Martin's Hip Hop text, one class member after another begin to give personal testimony about being silenced or shut out of conversations in classes, in religious institutions, in family gatherings, and other meaningful contexts. The session ends with open discussion about what students consider barriers to their collective ability to make their voices heard on campus and in the wider public sphere. The school newspaper receives particular attention, as many of the more progressive or self-described radical students consider it lacking a diversity of opinions and expressions. I suggested that today's news media apparatus such as web pages and the Internet might provide opportunities for writing for wider audiences. After class ended, nearly one-third of the class stayed behind for an additional hour-and-a-half worth of discussion. Martin took charge, saying that they should create their own publication, and the students present would serve as the first editorial board. Also these students decided to create a progressive student organization.

Two weeks later, a faculty member passed me in the cafeteria and asked what I thought about the new student publication. "Hey, you know about this?" After replying I didn't know what he was talking about, he handed me a copy of "The Truth" (Vol 1). This alternative, progressive publication consisted of a regular-sized sheet of paper with three separate columns dividing it on both sides. Each side contained roughly 5 – 7 short articles on topics ranging from

book summaries, racial justice, campus events, and other areas (Appendix C). "The Truth" also included original student poetry interspersed between the short articles. Despite this humble format, "The Truth" was mass-produced and distributed widely, blanketing the university. The alternative, student-initiated and produced publication began with a manifesto of sorts:

> *The Truth: Vol I*
>
> What Are We Getting Ourselves Into? Apparently there is only one way to get your point across without getting into trouble here: on the 'low.' So here we go. Some of you will get angry. Some of you will laugh. Some of you will go about your daily coast through your unconcerned lives, and never even notice that this is here...
>
> There will be no pretty pictures like in the other papers. There will be no flowery articles about "tough losses" or how many alumni came back for homecoming. None of that will matter a year from now...The only thing matters here is the TRUTH.

"The Truth" often used course readings as the foundation for short educational articles. For example, the first volume indexed the opening chapter of *A People's History of the United States* (1980), which details Columbus's accidental landing in the place now called the Americas, as well as the genocidal aftermath of Europeans' attempt to enslave the indigenous population:

> Betcha Didn't Know...
>
> On October 12, 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in the so-called "New World." It may have been new to him, but for the Tainos and Arawak

Indians that were there first, it had been home sweet home for thousands of years. The TRUTH is that Columbus, wasting no time, pulled out his guns and corrupted an entire society of people...Thus came about the birth of racism, (not to be confused with the European system of feudalism, which is mostly based on financial elitism), genocide of an entire nation of Caribbean natives. (Indians, not Jamaicans or Dominicans), and the international slave trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Five hundred and twelve years later, Americans, who are still coming to grips with our own history, celebrate a holiday in his honor? Well, we've determined that the only thing to say is 'Happy Columbus Day.'

While the first edition suppressed student writers' names out of fear of backlash from professors and/or other students, subsequent issues included names and specialty subject columns for each author. Students gave feedback for revisions, such as adding the names of authors, creating specialized columns, and including original raps and poems. My contribution was to offer extra credit; I had no role in shaping the content of this student produced publication.

The publication and wide distribution of "The Truth" is significant to the present study because it represents one of the key informants moving individual personal grievances into political action through the use of public acts of composition. In this way, Martin's publication represents not only a prime example of critical literacy, but also a guerrilla rhetorical action – much like Rap/Hip Hop – that uses language and whatever sparse resources at the

disposal to challenge existing structures of power. Most significantly, the planning, conceptualization, implementation, drafting, and distribution of this alternative progressive student publication was an outgrowth of Martin and other students' engagement with Rap, Hip Hop, and critical social theory in the composition classroom. The instructor had nothing to do with this project (until later, when Martin asked me to edit some of the writings and contribute a short article lending faculty support for the publication), nor was the project ever officially a part of the course. Such student-initiated acts of public composition represent robust forms of critical literacy that deserve further attention.

Holly

The critical engagements provided by African American rhetoric and Critical Social Theory (especially Marxist-socialist theory and Critical Race Theory) became meaningful to Holly's social-cultural world in significant, if not transformative ways. After overcoming resistance to perspectives that challenged liberal notions of race, class, and gender, Holly began to explore the workings of ideology and power in her own social world. Such explorations led Holly to initiate conversations about these issues outside of class, first with family and other loved ones, and eventually her peers and teachers in other classes. Such engagement culminated in Holly's critical participation in democracy as an activist, community service volunteer, and an organizer of progressive and radical campus student organizations. The major critical theories and themes dealing with racial, social, and economic justice moved beyond the composition classroom and became meaningful in Holly's socio-cultural world.

Understanding the ways both Holly and Alan experienced Rap, Hip Hop, and other forms of Black rhetoric and culture in college composition was interesting to the present study because it provides insight into the ways African American rhetoric functions as a *sociolect* --- a language for raising class consciousness across racial lines (Smitherman 1989, p. 108). This perspective is also useful for understanding resistance from composition students unfamiliar with or hostile to Black or other non-white subject matter in academic settings.

Resistance

Holly's rhetorical and cultural production outside of the composition classroom is significant considering what appeared to be rugged resistance against critical engagement in the first part of the course. Consider, for example, her reaction during a visual rhetoric seminar led by the university's writing center. One of the required assignments for the course was translating their major research project for the course into a web-based medium. Students are expected to consume web-based compositions but rarely ever given the opportunity themselves to create such media. One of the suppositions of the course was that critical literacy must help students to become producers of both writing and culture, with digital rhetoric such as websites, blogs, and internet-based social networks being the preferred "texts" in the new millennium. Constructing a website, for example, involves considerations of mode/genre, audience, purpose, and rhetorical situation required for academic writing. In this way, composing websites is comparable to the writing process itself. The seminar was also aimed at getting students to take advantage of new media

technology as a counter-hegemonic rhetoric; everyday, they are bombarded with advertising and other messages (i.e., war) by captains of industry who own the means of ideological reproduction.

This particular seminar focused on the ethics of visual rhetoric and included examples from *Time* magazine's alterations of images of the Iraq war that appeared to aim to portray the U.S. occupying presence in a less negative light. It also provided juxtaposed pictures of disgraced former star-athlete and actor OJ Simpson, in his mug shot picture, on the cover of *Time* magazine obviously made digitally darker by the publisher. Another example included an image of the parents of sextuplets on the cover of a popular magazine. The images in question focused on before and after pictures of the mother's teeth; severely disfigured in the original, the mother's smile had been digitally reconstructed (www.sree.net/teaching/photoethics.html). The class discussed the ethics of visual rhetoric, whether it was ethical to make such dramatic alterations to an original image to suit one's own, personal or political or aesthetic purposes. Why did the magazine give the mother of the sextuplets a digital orthodontic makeover? One student painfully explained that one's teeth in American society is a signifier of class status, saying that even "dental braces are indicators of wealth, money, and social status; it shows that you're not (white) 'trailer trash'." Holly chimes in, saying that the mother's bad teeth were an indicator that they were "hicks" who "obviously could not afford proper dental care." For readers of magazines such as *Time*, according to Holly, "we want

people to look good." Such manipulation of visual rhetoric raised no ethical issues because it was "OK to manipulate images to sell the magazine."

A few class sessions later, we discussed the ways that "power ideologies" manifest in the text, in response to a question from our Marxist exercise "chip game" (described earlier in chapter 5). We applied Althusser's theory of Repressive and Ideological State Apparatus (RSA and ISA) to an analysis of Assata. Students catalogued RSA's first, including the "kourt" system (students used Assata's spelling), education (both RSA and ISA, since schools have had the power of kicking out students, expelling them, disciplining them and punishing them in both physical and ideological ways), police and military forces, doctors, prisons, surveillance and harassment programs, with the FBI's notorious COINTELPRO being the most egregious example. From here, we moved on to discuss "White Privilege" by Peggy McIntosh, where she describes "Whiteness" as "an invisible knapsack," a metaphor for the hegemonic nature of White privilege. McIntosh gives a litany of examples of everyday privileges she and other White people enjoy, from not being racially profiled in stores to being able to purchase "flesh colored" Band-Aids that actually match her skin.

This last example generated much discussion in class, with most white students saying that they never thought about this – how something simple like the presumption of "flesh-colored" automatically referred to the complexions of white folks, and how this seemingly trivial thing reveals greater forces of hegemony, ideology, and economics at work together. After a few minutes of discussion, Holly dismissed the entire discussion away, saying "What's the big

deal? They (Blacks) can go and make their own bandages. Nobody's stopping black people from opening up their own Band-Aid businesses. Why should a company have to make bandages for every color in the world?" Rejecting McIntosh's argument that racism has less to do with individual "personal meanness" than the systemic ways that racial privileges and disadvantages are institutionalized and naturalized within culture, Holly dismissed racism an excuse to avoid personal responsibility.

What's significant here is not Holly's individual personal view of the world. As citizens in democracy, all views are respected, even thoughts with which we disagree. What was disconcerting, however, was the students' outright rejection of any and all facts, statistics, historical information, or other data that risked challenging her preconceived ideology in favor of personal opinion and unsupported subjective assertion. The failure to engage intellectually translated into less than satisfactory writing progress early in the semester, as the class was tasked with understanding basic Aristotelian conceptions of argument, which, on a basic level, consists of making claims and providing supporting evidence to buttress such claims.

Personal Explorations

Despite this resistance, over time Holly began a process of self-exploration in which she began to consider issues of race, class, and gender more seriously. Holly attended office hours frequently to continue conversations that began in class, or would use the time to ask questions developed from her engagement in the course. These experiences soon transferred into Holly's own

social worlds, as she engaged family, friends, and others in conversations about race, class, and gender outside of the course. This was evident during a joint interview with Holly and another student in the course (not a key informant). An excerpt from that recorded interview is included below:

> I talk a lot about the issues (discussed in class) with my boyfriend, just because things are on my mind. I pay attention to the news a lot more, and my approach to the news is different. I think I'm starting to analyze the news more instead of just listening to it. I was just talking about Israel last night, and about the American soldiers accused of torturing Iraqi prisoners. I talk more about the issues with my friends, especially [boyfriend] and my dad. He's real closed-minded, though. He grew up in Flint, sometimes keeping with the white (inaudible)...he stereotypes different parts of the town, east town, doesn't want me to drive there because he thinks it's unsafe. I'm not sure if this is a racial thing; I'm conflicted.

Significantly, Holly begins to discuss the ways the course has become meaningful within her own social and cultural worlds. Most notably, she says that she analyzes the news more, from a counter-hegemonic perspective, looking at not only what's said, but also those topics left unexplored. Such interrogation of the word and the way it shapes the larger world in which we live generated conversation with her boyfriend, whom she engages along with her father. This was one of many instances in fieldwork data in which major themes, theories, or

topics generated in the classroom became meaningful to students outside the course itself.

Social Engagement

Such engagement led to significant changes in Holly's social relations, in both productive and perhaps counter-productive ways. On the one hand, Holly found in her mother a source of support for her growing sense of racial and social justice. After expressing concern about her being "brainwashed" by a leftist college professor, Holly's mother became inquisitive, asking her about the class, course texts she'd find lying around the house, and radical changes in her buying and consumption habits (no longer purchasing high-end clothing and accessories). Like other key informants, Holly's mother actually read *Assata* on her own, and while still frightened by Black radical activism, expressed solidarity with her as a woman constrained in a "traditional homemaker" role in her own world. Additionally, the mother began reading and talking with Holly about some of the periodic socialist publications that soon entered the household. One day during office hours, Holly stopped in to tell me that her mother said "I think that I'm a socialist, too! I agree with all these things!" She pointed to universal health care, workers' right for more productive controls in the workplace, affordable homes and education as a human right for all. She talked briefly about joining Holly's parent organization, but seemed to have abandoned the idea, instead choosing to support financially and morally Holly's efforts to expand her education to include civic engagement, travel, conferences, and other activities.

She also purchased documentaries on Martin Luther King, Jr., Tom Brokaw's *1968*, and donated them to the class.

Holly's engagement with her father, however, was counter-productive, if not potentially destructive. In what she describes as a "typical macho Italian man," the father uses overtly racist rhetoric to refer to African Americans and lambasted Holly for her growing interest in issues of racial justice. After failing to dissuade Holly from perusing courses in Black Studies and an internship working for a non-profit in Kenya, Holly's father threatened to cut off funding for college completely --- a threat constantly being countered and kept in check by Holly's mother. Her father's reaction combined with harassment and intimidation from fellow classmates opposed to her new-found politics and identity. For instance, the words "pinko commie bitch" were once written on her door; similar harassment was aimed at disciplining Holly's attempt to expand her understanding of inequality and injustice in U.S. democracy.

Political Action

Such experiences both inside and outside of the "Writing Rap, Rhetoric, Revolution" seemed to only radicalize Holly further. She became frustrated with only engaging theory, and challenged me to help her and other like-minded students to form an anti-capitalist student organization on campus. Holly led the way in creating web blogs and other electronic forums for the group, and became leader in leftist campus protests and a nexus figure for progressive and radical campus activism. She quickly garnered a national reputation in American leftist circles for her commitment to racial and social justice, and was appointed

national coordinator of the campus organization's parent organization located in New York City. Holly's blog entry here reflects the radical changes in perspectives that occurred through her engagement with the course:

> Hello friends and comrades...
>
> What I want to share with you today is simply a message of hope, encouragement, and most importantly one of love. I don't normally speak in the abstract...so we'll see how this turns out.
>
> I am a socialist. As you can imagine, this means the way I analyze things are largely misunderstood in greater society. As soon as I label myself as such, I feel that a large number of people immediately close their minds off to what I have to say next. Dealing with a country that is largely influenced by conservative values throughout such entities as Rupert Murdoch's media empire, it is no surprise that those farther left than "democrat" are given the name "radicals." And the negative connotation that comes with it. My "radical" views such as advocating for equal access to education, freedom of reproductive choice, socio-economic parity for people of color, and the freedom for people to marry anyone of their choice—regardless of sexual orientation is seen as some sort of vile, social ill. Advocating for clean water, safe living facilities, un-biased elected officials, quality and available health care...oh no. How dare I even have the audacity to go there...Don't I remember where I came from—the United States? Don't I know that I live among the richest, most privileged and powerful peoples in the world?

> Yeah, I get that. But maybe I don't want to be a part of that legacy—because it is hurting more people than it is helping. Isn't there another side to the story? If there is someone prospering and gaining wealth, does that not also mean that someone else is suffering and living in poverty? In a world fueled by destructive capitalist philosophy—prioritizing profit of business over the labor of the workers—there is an overwhelming level of suffering. Some people in this country cannot afford the basic things they need in order to survive: food, water, shelter...and with a deficiency in those things there comes a lack of self dignity, motivation, creativity, and engagement. Approximately one percent of the population of the United States owns 1/3 of the personal wealth. That means that ninteysomething percent of the people own the rest. And because I think this is wrong, in the eyes of the larger society, I am wrong. Excuse me, but THAT is wrong.

Holly's writing here is self-consciously polemic, taking a militant rhetorical stance against American capitalism. In addition to reflecting Marxist theoretical concepts Holly engaged in the course, Holly also indexes classroom engagement with American hegemony and structural inequality:

> The myth of the American Dream needs to be dispelled immediately. How can people lift themselves up by the bootstraps if they don't have any boots?! In this country, it is extremely hard to work your way up when the entire system is against you. Oppressive STRUCTURES are the "trunks" of our problems. Our problems do not stem from bad presidents, corrupt governments, or biased judges. No, it is dangerous to blame individuals in

> the fight for social justice. Individual people die, but oppression continues...how do you explain that? It is not the actions of these individual people, but the policies they create, advocate, and implement. Our problems stem from the discriminatory policies that come from such institutions. Some examples of institutionalized discrimination include, but are not limited to: lack of funding for urban or rural schools, laws prohibiting people from being able to marry the person of their choice (anti- miscegenation and anti-same-sex marriage laws), biased curriculums (devoid of teaching critical thinking skills or select themes in history including class struggles, Black history and accurate war history) selected for public schools, gerrymandering of voting precincts to keep poor people and people of color from voting in blocs, ineffectual and un-enforced environmental policies...the list goes on.

Hip Hop Pedagogy

Initially, Holly's engagement with Rap/Hip Hop was ambivalent. She expressed appreciation for dead prez and Immortal Technique, but said such artists were "difficult to listen to." Her perspective on Rap/Hip Hop did not seem significant until she accepted an international internship in rural Kenya. She shared an experience where she provided an impromptu lesson on break dancing, at the demands of students attending an after school program:

> Part of the lesson was to give a short history of hip hop, the style of music that influenced break dancing. I was all over that! The book gave the basics—how hip hop started in NYC in the 1970s, DJing, dance halls,

break dancing on the street, etc., but since I was alone in the class I threw in my own tidbits of information! I explained to the learners that hip hop was born out of a culture of oppression, and that it was one way for poor black people to express themselves through story telling. I also talked about the influence of the griots from West Africa...

When one of the learners asked why the book stated that most break dancing was done without music, but with the beat counted out, that was when I talked about how early hip hop was created with few instruments because the people creating it weren't too wealthy. We then talked about how you can make music without instruments, using one's body: beat boxing, clapping hands, whistling, rapping, etc. So the book gave some of the essential information, and I filled in the gaps!

After that I had learners come to the front of the room and practice some of the popping, locking, and breaking moves in the book associated with break dancing. Then I had kids come up to the font of the class to do some traditional dancing ... Some of the learners pointed out on their own, without my prompting, that there were some similarities between break dancing and [traditional African dance]. It was truly an incredible experience, interacting with the kids, making connections to the outside world, and feeling like I was actually able to teach them something.

Holly's impromptu lesson in Hip Hop pedagogy mirrored the teaching on Rap/Hip Hop in the course. While not a Rap afficionado, Hip Hop pedagogy became

useful in Holly's lived experiences and interactions with students with a desire to incorporate African American rhetoric and culture into their own social worlds.

Alan:

Alan's engagement with Black rhetoric and culture in college composition, while less dramatic than Holly's, was significant for its impact on both cultural production and social-political engagement. In particular, Rap/Hip Hop sparked Alan's interest in other forms of musical protest, and the narrative of the Black Radical Tradition sparked an interest in campus political activism. Early in the semester, Alan appeared to have an interest in issues of structural inequality, which is evident in the field note below:

> Alan came to talk during office hours (approx: 3 p.m.). He's asking general questions about the course, making small talk, which leads me to believe he wants to talk about something else. We just finished our second day of class, so I ask him what did he think about the "chip game" introducing the class to Marxist theory. He says that he "kind of like [d] it." He tells me that he's not sure what to think about the conversation, that American society is inherently unequal, structured in such a way to ensure all kinds of inequalities between classes and races. He tells me about where he grew up [a college town, often perceived as elite], his mom's background working as a counselor in an inner-city high school, and his search for doing something of meaning with his college training. I tell him he has a wonderful, complex analysis, talking about the possible pros and cons of the exercise. I ask why didn't he say something in class. He

says, "I don't like confrontation" and that "I didn't want to say something stupid" based on preconceived notions. He says he just wanted to take everything in, to think about it some more. He also pointed to the fact that the only student of Color on the first day of class didn't come back to class on the second day; he was a South Asian student who looked clearly uncomfortable when the class reviewed the syllabus. Alan says that when he did try to speak, he used the word "we" in class to refer to Americans in general, and was challenged, with someone saying "who's 'we.'" Alan then goes to say, "So, I was like, yeah, already I'm the racist bigot" in the class. "I was referring to "we as a class." We end up talking about my mention of school funding as a form of structural inequality. He says he has an interest in this subject, as his mother talks about disparities she sees as a high school counselor. I suggest this as a potential research topic. As he's talking, I go on the net and google search a few sources for him.

Like Holly, Alan indicated that conversations about race, class, gender, and structural inequality moved from the classroom into conversations with family. In particular, Alan's mother is particularly interested in course readings and class activities. Alan says that his mother "gets excited, says that she wishes she could sit in the class." She also shares his enthusiasm with Zinn's "anti-history" of American society. Alan reports that what started with his request to help proof his essays turned into an all-out engagement with Zinn.

Alan's work as an active local musician helped connect him to class readings, activities, and discussions focused on Rap/Hip Hop. He was particularly interested in Rap's ability to communicate messages of protest and rebellion, and used the class as an opportunity to explore whether Euro-American music carried a similar tradition. He finds his answer in The Beatles, and in country singer Willie Nelson. Alan sent the short message and song lyrics of Nelson to the class listserve:

> Musical Protest
>
> Willie Nelson, pissed off at the news, penned this on Christmas Day, 2003, and recently started performing it. Let's hope the words of the talented Dennis Kucinich will seep into the souls of all of those who consider themselves good Americans and good world citizens. War is not *the answer.*
>
> **Whatever Happened to Peace on Earth?**
>
> There's so many things going on in the world
> Babies dying
> Mothers crying
> How much oil is one human life worth
> And what ever happened to peace on earth

We believe everything that they tell us

They're gonna' kill us

So we gotta' kill them first

But I remember a commandment

Thou shall not kill

How much is that soldier's life worth

And whatever happened to peace on

earth

And the bewildered herd is still

believing

Everything we've been told from our

birth

Hell they won't lie to me

Not on my own damn TV

But how much is a liar's word worth

And whatever happened to peace on

earth

So I guess it's just

Do unto others before they do it to you

Let's just kill em' all and let God sort

em' out

Is this what God wants us to do

And the bewildered herd is still

believing

Everything we've been told from our

birth

Hell they won't lie to me

Not on my own damn TV

But how much is a liar's word worth

And whatever happened to peace on

earth

But don't confuse caring for weakness

You can't put that label on me

The truth is my weapon of mass

protection

And I believe truth sets you free

And the bewildered herd is still

believing

Everything we've been told from our

birth

Hell they won't lie to me

Not on my own damn TV

But how much is a liar's word worth

And whatever happened to peace on

earth (Nelson 2003)

While Alan says that he did not listen to Hip Hop before the course, he was interested in hearing more about socialist rap duo dead prez, Mos Def, and Talib Kweli. He reported that Ohhla.com, a popular website contained Rap lyrics to most Hip Hop songs, helped him find rap lyrics and read them as "texts," a method he prefers.

Like Holly, Alan developed an interest in radical activism. He shared this interest with his father, a factory worker and union representative, who promptly suspected that his college composition instructor was involving his son in potentially dangerous political activity. Alan's father requested a face-to-face meeting with me. Over dinner at a local sports bar preferred by the workers at his factory, Alan's father asked me to explain what his son "was getting into" [Alan's involvement with the campus activist organization]. With concerted effort, I avoided using academic and socialist jargon and explained that the group -- which I will call here "United Movement for Socialism and Democracy"-- wanted the same things as the union. We want a living wage instead of a minimum wage, and also various levels of worker ownership of the companies that profit from our labor. We want universal health care provided to all citizens, regardless of income; we want free high qualities schools, from kindergarten through graduate school, regardless of income, race, or social class. We want affordable housing available to all people – to name only a few of the basic requirements that Democratic Socialists consider fundamental human rights.

Alan's father agreed that such things coincided with his union, and since that meeting, Alan has become a leader in campus anti-racist initiatives,

including petitions and protests against various speakers associated with racist skinheads, the Nationalist Socialist Movement (American "neo-Nazis"), the British Nationalist Party, and the Ku Klux Klan which held a recent rally not far from the university.

Analysis of qualitative research data reveals that a critical writing pedagogy consisting of Rap/Hip Hop, African American Rhetoric, and critical social theory became meaningful in students' rhetorical production and social-cultural practices both within college composition and in their own socio-cultural worlds. Levels of engagement differed significantly, from individual self-examination (Joanne), to the creation of counter-hegemonic rhetorical artifacts (Martin), to overt radical political activism (Alan and Holly). Nevertheless, data collected from each key informant indicated a shared direct engagement with structural racism and other forms of systematic inequality in U.S. capitalist democracy. These structures ranged from challenging symbolic/rhetorical structures, working to obfuscate or justify unfair treatment of Blacks, Latinos, and women, to direct action in the form of radical anti-capitalist political organizing. These findings have significant implications for critical literacy and liberatory pedagogy in college composition, as well as for critical Hip Hop studies, Black Studies, and education for civic engagement in critical democracy in the new millennium.

Chapter 7

Discussion, Overview, and Implications for Future Research

Analysis of critical ethnographic data generated in this research indicates that students appropriated for themselves the critical engagements offered through Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory in a first-year college composition course. Each conceptual framework facilitated student's production of critical writing that explored race, class, and gender inequality. Critical engagements with the multiple and diverse texts of the course transferred into students' socio-cultural spheres. The four key informants in this study routinely indexed African American rhetoric and critical social theory concepts in their engagement with unjust rhetorical and institutional structures of power within their own social worlds. Student appropriation and re-appropriation of the critical engagements provided by the course curriculum reflected the pedagogical and political objectives of critical literacy. Key informants produced writing that demonstrated their understandings of the complex ways race, class, and gender operate within texts. This awareness then transferred into students' engagement with structural inequality within their own, social worlds. In different ways, key informants in this study indexed the perspectives provided through Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory in their attempts to bring about a more just, equitable democratic society. From making their voices heard through Black spoken word poetry, guerrilla-style publications impacting the Hip Hop Generation, to organized radical activism, to becoming

teachers of Hip Hop pedagogy and critical literacy themselves, the participants in this study exemplified what it means to use literacy to "read the word and the world" in order to change it.

Chapter 1 of this research project sought to situate this work within the backdrop of the "New Racial Domain" of 21st century structural racism (Marable 2005). At the time of this writing, the United States finds itself mired in its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Home foreclosures and subsequent homeless rates for families are at their highest levels since 1932. Unemployment rates have skyrocketed to numbers not seen since three decades ago, and unprecedented millions of jobs continue to "disappear" due to corporate America's insatiable lust for cheap, easily exploitable labor markets overseas. If such conditions are disastrous for Whites, for Blacks the situation is catastrophic. African Americans find themselves at bottom-basement levels in each situation. If critical literacy -- with its promises of equipping students with the kinds of language skills that would lead them to become critical participants towards a more just and equitable democracy -- is to be relevant as we move forward in the new millennium, then new, innovative methods are needed to bring such instruction to bear on the reality of structural racism, economic exploitation, and other forms of systemic injustice.

The results of the present study offer possible contributions to critical approaches to race, class, and gender in college composition. Data analysis revealed that the four key informants in this study appropriated for themselves Black rhetoric and culture as a *sociolect*, or language of class and racial

consciousness. Not only the four key informants, but taken as a whole, the students in this first-year college composition course, focused on Rap/Hip Hop, African American Rhetoric and critical social theory, produced a wide range of critical texts – ranging from academic essays, dialogic journal writing, poetry, Rap/Hip Hop, articles published by newspapers, web blogs, to the construction of their own student publication. Particularly significant here was the fact that each instance of counter-hegemonic rhetorical and cultural production was initiated by students themselves. That such student-initiated rhetorical and political action took place outside of the teacher-researcher's direction clearly illustrates the significant, transformative ways that the critical approach to college composition constructed for this study became meaningful.

Chapter 2 examined established literature in uses of Rap/Hip Hop and African American rhetoric in composition pedagogy. Workers in African American Language, literature, and cultural studies provided useful theoretical and pedagogical foundations for introducing Rap/Hip Hop as a method for raising student racial and class consciousness in writing pedagogy. Scholarship in college composition, however, has been limited to using Rap/Hip Hop and other forms of African American rhetoric and culture as a "bridge" or a tool of convenience for inculcating Black or other marginalized students into canonical literature or standardized discourses of stasis and mainstream conformity. Such uses also raised questions about the ways composition constructs meaning within Hip Hop, as some approaches – while well-meaning and useful for achieving established educational objectives – sometimes lead to significant

misreading and misinterpretations of Rap lyrics that undermine its usage in the classroom.

This is not to contend that Rap/Hip possesses a singular meaning. Tricia Rose for example argues that much of Rap/Hip Hop (including so-called gangsta and/or commercial rap) contains a "hidden text" inscribing politics and social critique not readily apparent in surface readings. Rap/Hip Hop, like the best of literature, is rich with symbolic meaning; it can be read in multiple ways, depending upon the background, experiences, and worldviews readers bring with them to the Hip Hop textual encounter. My concern, however, was that many critical methods which purport to empower marginalized students and represent subaltern voices through Rap/Hip Hop inadvertently tokenize and trivialize the radical politics that underlies much of Rap/Hip Hop in the first place.

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study sought to overcome such limitations by conceptualizing Rap/Hip Hop and African American rhetoric as something more than a tool of convenience for achieving standardizing educational ends. Instead, Black language and culture are here theorized as constituting social action, reflecting the development of critical racial and class consciousness. Established approaches to critical literacy aim to develop class conscious; however, in the context of the New Racial Domain, consciousness or awareness of structures of injustice and exploitation is not enough. The theoretical basis for this project instead defines "consciousness" in a way that moves beyond passive awareness into the direct social-political engagement against established structures of oppression. This engagement is mediated by language as social

action, taking shape within tangible, material conditions within the social worlds in which students live.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology for the research project, critical ethnography. This approach to qualitative research was useful for providing insight into students' socio-cultural actions within naturally reoccurring social settings. A wide variety of artifacts were used, including field notes from participant-observation, classroom writings, and a variety of student-produced texts generated outside of the composition classroom. Critical ethnography's focus on language or discourse produced within meaningful socio-cultural contexts made it an especially useful research method for this study, which sought to understand the ways students experienced critical writing pedagogy both within and outside of official classroom settings.

Chapter 5 provided analysis of student classroom writing to understand the ways key informants made meaning of the major theoretical concepts incorporated in the writing curriculum. This part of the data analysis revealed that students appropriated for themselves the critical engagements provided by African American rhetoric, critical social theory, and Rap/Hip Hop. Students indexed major theoretical concepts for a variety of writing tasks to "read the word and the world." They used these conceptual frameworks for understanding the workings of race, class, gender, ideology, and power within classroom texts and the wider socio-cultural contexts of their own worlds.

Chapter 6 of the data analysis explored whether Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric and critical social theory became meaningful within students'

own social worlds. Analysis of a wide constellation of qualitative research data indicated that key informants indexed the major concepts provided in the course to engage existing structures of racial, social, gender, and economic injustice. Such findings suggest that the approach to college composition provided in this critical ethnographic study facilitates critical literacy in college composition and stimulates critical participation in democracy, beyond the limited confines of the writing classroom.

Limitations

There are several possible limitations to this study. The observational case for this qualitative project consisted of four key informants in a university-required writing classroom at a major public university in the upper Midwest. Future studies should employ a larger sample size for insight into more varied experiences. Additionally, the key informants here represented a Black/White divide, with no explicit attention to the ways that other marginalized groups, such as Latino/a-Americans, might have experienced the course. And while the key informants came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (from *un*working to upper middle class), all lived within the same general region of the state in which the study took place. Regional diversity and racial diversity in the selection of key informants might engender a more complex array of results.

Another possible limitation to the study is that the key informants for this study could be characterized as "high achievers." Their grade point averages ranged from 3.0 – 3.75, well within "honors" distinction. Each key informant performed exceptionally well in the writing course, and each produced a variety

of critical texts (from academic writing to poetry to performance and visual art) that suggested high level talent, skill, and ability. The outcomes for students in a first-year remedial writing class might garner different ethnographic results – not due to ability, but out of the necessity of such students to master standard language and composition for their educational survival in the academy.

In the U.S. context of a powerful resurgent conservative backlash against "leftist" teachers in colleges and universities, the curriculum outlined here could be attacked for being "too political." Its conversations about structural racism leave little room for embracing mainstream beliefs about minorities' mental deficits or their collective victim-based mentalities. And while at least one text in the course was devoted to sharing such views (Dinesh D'Souza's *The End of Racism*, 1995), progressive or radical texts dominated course readings. Such a curriculum might alienate more culturally and politically conservative students, who might view the course focus as alien or even hostile to their views. This possibility, however, must not in any way pressure teachers of critical literacy to depoliticize or even moderate critical approaches to teaching college composition. The current historical moment is marked by U.S. "preemptive wars" of aggression overseas, a perpetual war against African Americans here at home, (especially Black males, who remain the constant victims of police brutality, extra-judicial police shootings, and the Prison Industrial Complex), and sustained attacks against the working class and the poor. In this context, progressive and radical teachers have a pedagogical imperative to introduce students to invariable links between language, consciousness, and social action.

Acknowledging that the pedagogy discussed here in this research project risks complaints that critical literacy is "too political" from students who enter the composition classroom with strong socially and politically conservative views is necessary because of the risk of such students attacking the professionalism of critical educators with college administrators. Progressive and radical educators often receive negative evaluations, administrative discipline, or worse based on conservative backlash. Teachers of Color are especially at risk to such treatment. For some students, it is one thing for White teachers to talk about critical issues of racism, discrimination, and American injustice. It is quite another for Blacks and other People of Color to do the same, whose own race is often implicated by students into the instruction (Jackson and Smitherman, 2002). And in the backdrop of heightened McCarthy-era-like "culture wars" waged by right-wing activists (i.e., David Horowitz and his catalogue of *101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*, 2006), the threat of conservative backlash against critical approaches to college composition extends beyond professional risks. I can attest to this personally; I've been publically targeted by right-wing student groups as a "Communist" and as a "threat to Western civilization" (Bristow, 2007). I even received anonymous death threats after a conservative radio and internet news talk show with access to right-wing internet news media denounced me as a "Sunni Muslim," a "Marxist," and "supporter of communism" (Brown, 2006; Kline, 2007). Teachers considering adopting critical approaches to college composition, such as the pedagogical approaches I

have described in the current research project, should anticipate such responses and prepare themselves accordingly, professionally and otherwise.

Nonetheless, several dynamics of the study appear to have counterbalanced these possible limitations. The primary aim of this research was to understand the ways students experienced a college composition curriculum of Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory both in and outside of official classroom settings. This insight required extensive participant-observation over long periods of time to begin to understand the complexity of students' personal background, ideology, personal tastes, fears, prejudices, and preferences. Extensive fieldwork was needed to gain entry into students' socio-cultural worlds, making connections and establishing a level of trust needed for open, honest conversation. In addition, particular attention had to be given to spontaneous encounters and interactions by students (an office visit, a phone call, a request to join a protest, for example), as they offered valuable opportunities for recording and collecting data. Such extensive, intimate encounters with key informants needed for data gathering would be much more difficult, if not impossible, for a single researcher conducting qualitative research on a larger group of participants. Nevertheless, the data generated from the key informants here might serve as the basis for larger studies in the future.

While key informants are in fact divided along racial lines, the ways Black and White students responded to the course nevertheless generated interesting results for both groups. The study examined each key informant individually, not comparatively, thus valuing the subjective experiences of each student.

Additionally, this research was conducted in a region of the upper Midwest where the lines of demarcation between Black and White have been and remain a material reality. *De facto* segregation, racial profiling and police brutality against African Americans, race riots, hate crimes, disparities in educational funding and life chances – all of these factors form the backdrop of these students' social worlds. So while they did not reflect the diverse tapestry of racial groups in the United States, the bipolar racial composition of the key informants does reflect the material reality of the world in which they live.

Outcomes of this study might differ with key informants with different levels of academic achievement. However, academic competence is but one variable in the complex endeavor of literacy pedagogy. As Paulo Freire taught, "critical pedagogy is not a method," cautioning North American educators whom he feared wanted a "one size fits all" approach to literacy teaching (2001, p. 6). Rather, critical approaches to literacy pedagogy must vary accounting to rhetorical and social contexts. What works in one setting might be less effective in another based on the needs, backgrounds, institutional settings, and educational objectives of a particular first-year college composition course.

There is validity in the possibility that some students (and institutions) might reject the invitations for critical explorations offered by Black rhetoric and culture in college composition, including Rap/Hip Hop. This is especially so when such a curriculum is accompanied by critical approaches to race, class, and gender such as Marxist theory, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist/Womanist theory. Conservative media commentators such as David

Horowitz have devoted their careers to exposing and "purging" college professors who "indoctrinate" their young charges with "radical" Marxist-socialist-communist ideology in college courses. As evidence, such critics point to the presence of readings and assignments such as those found in the first-year composition course in the present study, texts that explicitly focus on the politics of race, representation, and difference in U.S. society. Such criticism is itself a particular political position, largely promulgated by right-wing conservatives. Politics, like ideology, is invariably linked to the teaching of language and literacy. The composition classroom can no more explicate itself from the politics of race than a course on Shakespeare can separate itself from the use of the English language. As Fanon once said, to teach a language is to teach a worldview.

A more salient question would be whether the critical writing classroom allowed for alternative, unpopular viewpoints. The course in the current study certainly did so, as students – including the key informants – often engaged in rigorous, sometimes highly emotional debates over the nature of American identity, democracy, privilege, and social change. This conflict, which generated dialogic exchanges both inside and outside of the classroom leading to critical thinking and discussion, was a necessary cornerstone of the course.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this critical ethnography of Rap, African American rhetoric, and critical social theory offer useful contributions to college composition, Critical Hip Hop Studies, English education, and African American Studies. The transformative impact of this approach expands existing approaches to critical

literacy in college composition that focus on developing student awareness or consciousness of racial injustice. The results of this study demonstrated that more efforts are needed to facilitate critical awareness into transformative social action through critical participation in democracy. In the current context of the New Racial Domain and on-going crisis of global capitalism, such democratic participation on the part of critically informed students might be paramount to the nation's – if not the world's – future.

An ancillary but nevertheless important contribution of the study to college composition is its emphasis on empirical research. The underlying supposition guiding critical literacy over the past several decades is that such pedagogy engages students in experiences that lead social actions toward a more just society. Evidence supporting this claim – focusing on what students actually do outside of producing written texts in the composition classroom – is severely lacking. Critical educators who take seriously the Freirean charge to teach students to "read the word and the world" will find in the current project examples of critical ethnographic research useful for future studies.

Critical Hip Hop Studies

This project also seeks to contribute and expand Critical Hip Hop Studies (especially New Literacy Studies). Much of this work is devoted to using Rap/Hip Hop as a scaffold to achieve mainstream, canonical ends. While this approach is valuable and sometimes necessary, the theoretical grounding and practical application of Rap/Hip Hop and critical social theory illuminate subaltern politics usually submerged in "contrastive" or comparative uses of Black rhetoric and

culture in the composition classroom. While the politics of mainstream artists like Jay-Z, T.I., and 50 Cent are lamented by academic cultural critics, the radical messages of Immortal Technique, dead prez, and The Coup are ignored as if unworthy of serious commentary. An implicit goal of this project was to bring these underground voices to the surface for critical exploration and celebration.

The current crisis of the Hip Hop Generation seems to underscore the value of this approach. African Americans in the New Racial Domain confront systemic, state-sponsored forms of discrimination and racial terror in the form of underfunded schools, suspensions and expulsions, prison sentencing, police brutality and extra-judicial police shootings, Black name and linguistic profiling, among many forces aimed at excluding African Americans from full participation in democracy. Despite decades of research exposing these post-Brown forms of institutional discrimination, U.S. public policy has yet to embrace the lexicon of symbolic racism. Radical approaches to Hip Hop Pedagogy in college composition offers valuable opportunities for identifying and disrupting the largely invisible "linguistics of white supremacy" (Sledd, 1969; Smitherman 2000a) underlying today's racial status quo.

African American Studies

This project's theoretical eclecticism (combining Rap/Hip Hop, African American rhetoric, and critical social theories that included Marxism, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminism/Womanism) was deeply grounded in the transformationist paradigm of African American Studies (Hall 1999, p. 78; Marable 2000, p. 190). Black Studies today is growing and expanding

institutionally, with increasing numbers of graduate programs – including doctoral degree programs – in colleges and universities across the United States. At the same time, material conditions for African Americans continue to deteriorate rapidly: joblessness, homelessness, school failure, unsafe communities, Black male underachievement, to name only a few areas of social and economic crisis. This situation demands increased research and teaching in Black Studies devoted to identifying and counteracting the complex underlying social, political, and economic forces that reproduce such undesirable conditions.

As such, the current research project embraces a conception of the discipline not predetermined by ideology, but purpose and utility. Transformationists use all means necessary--academic publication, teaching, lecturing, television, popular cultural forms such as music, Rap/Hip Hop, just to name a few--in an attempt to move beyond academic "critique" into literally transforming the institutions historically responsible for the continued oppression and decimation of our people. The current crisis in Black communities nationwide demands that ancient feuds over theory that has fed pernicious disciplinary chauvinism be put to rest. By embracing a radical diversity of theoretical perspectives, I hope this research provides African American and African Studies with another example of critical scholarship guided by informed theoretical and pedagogical praxis, reflecting the Black Studies ethos of academic excellence and social responsibility.

Appendix A: Coding Schema Template

	CODING CATAGORY	CODE	CODING #
RHETORICAL PRODUCTION	MARXISM	"The problem with capitalism"	MX 1
		Ideological State Apparatus/hegemony	MX 2
		Class analysis	MX 3
		Racism/capitalism nexus	MX 4
		"socialism is the devil"	MX 5
		American-ness, patriotism	MX 6
		"Marx can't have my religion!"	MX 7
		"I am not free"	MX 8
		Self-stated changes in consciousness	MX 9
		Marxism Other:	MX A1A
	CRITICAL RACE THEORY	"Lies my teacher told me / mis-education	CRT 10
		People are racist because they are not taught any better	CRT 11
		"They schools"/	CRT 12
		"Founding Fathers" were "men of their times"	CRT 13
		Things get better with time	CRT 14
		Rugged individualism/"bootstrap" rhetoric	CRT 15
		The "white"-ness of the whiteness	CRT 16
		On non-violence	CRT 17
		On Kumbaya / "can't we all just get along"	CRT 18
		Racism is permanent because it is beneficial	CRT 19
		Racism can change if we just teach people better	CRT 20
		Let's face it: that's just the way it is	CRT 21
		Critical Race Theory Other:	CRT B2B
	BLACK FEMINISM/WOMANISM	Matrix of domination	BFW 22
		Revolutionary leadership	BFW 23
		"disease called strength"	BFW 24
		standards of beauty	BFW 25
		courage	BFW 26
		"my voice will be heard"	BFW 27
		fight/resistance	BFW 28
		Silence	BFW 29
		BFW Other	BFW C3C

Appendix B: Research Project Consent Form

(Note: Course identification and institutional names have been redacted to ensure the anonymity of the key informants in this study)

Research Project Consent Form
University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS)
Teaching Critical Literacy Through African American and Youth Popular Culture

You are being asked to participate in a research project to be conducted in [redacted text]. This project explores different ways popular ("pop") culture can help teach writing and make required writing classes more relevant and interesting to college students. In addition to completing required reading and writing assignments for [redacted], we'll also look at, discuss, and write about different forms of music, video, movies, and other elements of "pop" culture. Since this project involves looking at your writing, and recording (through notes, videotape, audiotape and interview) some of the things that happen during this semester, your permission for participation is requested. Your participation is not required for [redacted] . You will not be penalized in any way if you decline the invitation to participate in this study. If you do choose to participate, you can refuse to take part in certain activities or completely opt out of participation at any time without penalty. Extra credit is provided for students who chose to take part in this study. If you do chose to participate, this form provides your permission for me to audiotape and videotape some of our classroom and one-on-one conversations, and include some of the writings you'll complete in [redacted] into my study.

Participation in this project requires (1) regular class attendance in [redacted], and (2) an additional seven (7), 15-20 minute one-on-one interviews with me. Your privacy will be respected to the maximum extent allowable by law throughout this project. Additionally, I will use pseudonyms (false names) in place of your real name in order to help maintain your anonymity in any transcripts, notes, or other written or recorded documents. You have the right to ask questions about this project at any time and can refuse participation at any point during this project.

Participants in this project receive extra credit up to 5% toward the final grade. Alternative extra credit writing assignments worth up to 5% toward final grade will be available if you choose not to participate in this project. Note: you cannot receive extra credit for both participation in this research **and** completing extra credit writing assignments. If you are interested in extra credit, please choose either the extra credit writing assignments **or** participation in this research project. There is no grade penalty or disadvantage for **not** participating in extra

Appendix B (Cont'd)

credit assignments.

We will be discussing many controversial subjects this semester. At times, you may feel that your own, personal perspective is at odds or devalued in classroom discussions. I will attempt to minimize such feelings by 1) helping to create an open, trusting classroom environment in which all perspectives are valued and given equal time; 2) assessing/grading your progress in [redacted] based on your writing development, not your expressed personal (socio-political, religious, ideological) perspective; and 3) regularly requesting your input -- as a class and as individuals -- as to how you are experiencing the class. If at any time you have questions or concerns about the class and/or your participation in the research, please contact the study coordinator or primary investigator at any time (contact information listed below).

If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact: (anonymously, if you wish):

[redacted]

I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Print name: _____

Signature:_____

Date:_____

You will be given a copy of this signed form at our next class meeting.

Appendix C

The Truth Is...

Volume I, Issue I

"To be ignorant is to be afraid"
– E.H.

What Are We Getting Ourselves Into?

Apparently there is only way to get your point across without getting into trouble here: on the 'low.' So here we go. Some of you will get angry. Some of you will laugh. Some of you will go about your daily routines and coast through your unconcerned lives, and never even notice that this is here. This is for YOU, the STUDENTS. Nobody else. There will be no pretty pictures like in the other paper. There will be no flowery articles about "tough losses" or how many alumni cam back for homecoming. None of that will matter a year from now when the other paper is recycling the same crap from yeas past to make it sound fresh. The only thing you will find here is the TRUTH. First, let's get on the same page as to what the TRUTH actually is. Webster's defines TRUTH as, *a statement or true thing; a verified fact; a true statement or proposition; an established principle, fixed law, or the like; as, the great truths of morals."* Got it? Good. Let's move on. (cont'd on reverse)

Betcha Didn't Know...

On October 12, 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in the so-called "New World." It may have been new to him, but for the Tainos and Arawak Indians that were there first, it had been home sweet home for thousands of years. The TRUTH that Columbus, wasting no time, pulled out his guns and corrupted an entire society of people. They greeted him with gifts. He made them slaves. There as none of the gold and spices to be found that he'd promised his Spanish investors, but there were servants by the boatload...which is exactly what he captured on his second expedition to the Americas. On this second trip. He was allotted 17 boats and over a thousand men to help him sail. In his book, *The Devastation of the Indies,"* Fray Bartholome de Las Casas (to be fair, one of Columbus's biggest critics of the time), wrote that the Spaniards *"laid bets as to who, with one stroke of the sword, could split a man in two. They took infants from their mothers and threw them into the rivers, roaring with laughter. They burned captives alive, and, becomes on few and because on few and far between occasions the Indians justifiably killed some, the Spaniards made a rule among themselves that for every (crew member) slain, they would slay a hundred Indians."* Thus came about the birth of racism (not to be confused with the European system of feudalism, which is mostly based on financial elitism), genocide of an entire nation of Caribbean natives (Indians, not Jamaicans or Dominicans), and the international slave trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. 512 years later, Americans, who are still coming to groups without own history, celebrate a holiday in his honor? Well, we've determined that the only thing to say is "Happy Columbus Day."

Birds of a Feather...

The TRUTH is that both of the *recognized* candidates for president are rich white guys from New England. That's right, the former governor of Texas is actually from New Haven, Ct. Both Kerry and the cowboy attended Yale (at the SAME TIME) and were both members of the infamous) *Skull and*

Appendix C (Cont'd)

What Are We Getting Ourselves Into? (Cont'd)

The language here will be appropriately bunt, but will not always be 'clean.' Life makes you have to say bad words sometimes, but our focus is not to be vulgar just for the sake of vulgarity. Our focus is to unearth the other side of the coin: to offer an alternative angle with as little subjective perspective as possible. The TRUTH is that in order to be considered a well-rounded individual by the powers that be, the college subtly encourages students to keep their thoughts and grievances to themselves, if their perspectives risks stepping on the wrong toes. That style of programming doesn't make you well rounded. It only makes you a "Yes-Man" or "Yes-Woman" in training.

We'll pick that up another time. That said, *The Truth Is...* will not be a 'bitch-and-gripe-about-the-College' publication. Our focus will primarily be to provide news that doesn't end up on Fox ("Not") News, and CNN – Censored News Network. Finally, it will not be our focus simply to provide 'entertainment' between classes. No horoscopes. No crossword puzzles. We have taken as our mission to provoke a position, popular or not, on issues that (should) concern you as students and global citizens. We offer the challenge to learn, read, and REACT.

Birds of a Feather... (Cont'd)

Crossbones secret society. That said, there are roughly six candidates for president in this year's election covering a wide range of political parties from Socialists to Libertarians to Independents. Form the Green Party to the Prohibition Party, and from the United Christians Party to the Native American Party. Yes, the Native Americans *do* have a political party. In the fading days of the 2004 election cycle, remember that you only get one vote. Don't vote for a candidate just because everybody says it's right. Afraid of wasting your vote? If you can sleep at night and have peace of mind on the evening of November 2nd, there's no such thing as a wasted vote. Sometimes the long shots make it across the finish line first.

RM Cleared of Charge
The truth is that R.M. didn't drop the so-called "N"-bomb on anybody (by "N"-bomb, we mean the word "nigger"). There is a widely accepted idea that Adelphics are racists as a whole. Guess what...Al Swain is an Adelphic. We know he's blind, but he's certainly not stupid. While there ARE some Adelphics that can't say the "N"-word loud enough (especially when they're not quite 'level'), the fraternity overall is **not** a racist group. Here's an idea...get to know them before you write them off.

Have You Noticed Lately? Check it out...

...that there are damned near as many new teachers as there are students this year? Seems like student retention isn't the only problem going on 'round these parts.

...that most Republicans cry out that "Fahrenheit 9/11" is the worst movie ever made whether they've seen it or not? Nobody said that about "Birth of a Nation."

...any team that gests 78 points run up on them against the Wing-T deserves to get their asses kicked?

...W.O.C.R. has a "World Music" show this year?

...Free Yo' Mind has a house band, but the College doesn't have a marching band?

...there hasn't been a single meeting for the Black Student Union all year?

...Eta Psi Kappa has made the African American Cultural Center *their* house, complete with banners and other paraphernalia?

...that the African American Cultural Center is nothing more than an overflow dormitory? What's so 'cultural' about it?

...Nu Gamma Xi FINALLY painted over that ugly yellow color? Come on, y'all. Get with the program.

Until we meet again...

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