DON'T THROW OUT WEEZY F. BABY WITH THE BATHWATER: LIL WAYNE AS A WINDOW INTO POST-SOUL/HIP HOP ERA BLACK MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTION, PERFORMANCE, AND RECEPTION

By

Natalie Jovon Graham

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

American Studies-Doctor of Philosphy

2013

ABSTRACT

DON'T THROW OUT WEEZY F. BABY WITH THE BATHWATER: LIL WAYNE AS A WINDOW INTO POST-SOUL/HIP HOP ERA BLACK MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTION, PERFORMANCE, AND RECEPTION

By

Natalie Jovon Graham

During the period spanning from 1980-2008 images of black men in popular culture shifted dramatically in concert with the political, social, and economic experience of black people in the U.S. As rap music came of age in that period, its artists reflect the cultural milieu out of which they came. Situated at the juncture of Black Studies, Cultural Geography, Music, and Literature Studies, this dissertation analyzes the representation and reality of black masculinity, using hip hop megastar Lil Wayne as a case study. I investigate the ways that black masculinity is performed in dialogue with the black community, the city of New Orleans, the U.S. South, and the nation. Lil Wayne's music is a briar patch of entangled ironies. His work demonstrates both the persistence of black rhetorical practices and the presence of mainstream pop music formulas. His conception of gender operates within a framework that both disrupts and replicates black gangster stereotypes. Although his shape-shifting masculinity over time reflects a widening of possibilities for black masculinity, I argue that traditional black rhetorical practices persist in hip hop and that race still marks rhetorical and image-making strategies in popular culture. Also, even as the rhetoric of race is increasingly discoursed in terms of its decreasing significance in popular culture, racialized identities must negotiate the new mainstream expectations of race and gender to remain commercially viable.

for Jo Ann Woods Graham and Nathaniel Graham Sr.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A dissertation is like nothing else; so many hands press it finally together. Many thanks go out to the friends and family who encouraged me, especially Ronald Lee and The Baby Kitchen. Also, thanks to my dissertation committee: Dr. Pero Dagbovie, Dr. Geneva Smitherman, Dr. Gary Hoppenstand, and Dr. Kenneth Prouty. Your academic guidance and support were invaluable. Dr. Dagbovie, you're an exemplary chair and prime example of hustle. Finally, thank you to MSU's Upward Bound students and staff, keep striving; Mrs. Eiland you've been a mother to me and so many others.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

By the time I was born, it was too late. Eighties babies might vaguely remember the artists in what is fondly remembered by Tricia Rose and others as the "golden age of hip hop," but most of these rappers have already fallen victim to premature aging in the accelerated time warp known as popular culture. Even in their most reviled manifestations (i.e., N.W.A. and 2 Live Crew), the artists of the late eighties and very early nineties are fondly spoken of as "more complex and ambivalent . . . interesting social critics."[1] Although I credit Rose's seminal 1994 text, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America,* for my baptism into the possibility of hip hop scholarship, I argue that careful inquiry into the content, verbal dexterity, and cultural signification of Dwayne Carter (Lil Wayne) does, in fact, provide us with complexity, ambivalence, and social criticism found in the golden age of hip hop. At least part of the problem with these newer artists is the lack scholarship dedicated to understanding the relevance of their cultural work.

As Gail Woldu acknowledges in her assessment of hip hop scholarship, "One final area of published work needs to be pursued more ambitiously: monograph-length studies of individual performers and groups."[2] While many journalists have written books for general interest, very few texts, including Greg Thomas' *Hip-Hop Revolution in the Flesh: Power, Knowledge, and Pleasure in Lil' Kim's Lyricism* and Michel Eric Dyson's *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*, are single-authored, focused on the work of individual performers and groups, and intended for an academic audience. This project seeks to fill this

---

[1] Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why it Matters* (New York: BasicCivitas, 2008), 2.

[2] Gail Hilson Woldu. "The Kaleidoscope of Writing on Hip-Hop Culture." *Notes* 67, no. 1 (2010): 35, http://muse.jhu.edu/ (accessed September 21, 2010), doi: 10.1353/not.2010.0031.

void in the body of scholarly production on hip hop by highlighting the rhetoric, image, and impact of Dwayne Carter's musical production. Why Carter (Lil Wayne)?

Dwayne Michael Carter Jr. was born in the seventeenth ward of New Orleans, September 27, 1982. He was born in Hollygrove, a notoriously rough neighborhood, in a city that was literally the murder capital of the U.S. during Carter's teen years.[3] Though he is from the Hollygrove neighborhood, it might not be quite accurate to say he grew up there, since he was working for Cash Money records by the time he was eleven and was touring with the Hot Boys shortly thereafter. It might be just as accurate to say that he was raised in the music. Although he contributed on BG's first album *True Story* in 1995, Wayne officially debuted with the Hot Boys at the age of fifteen with *Get It How U Live!* By the end of 1999, Carter, among his other work, had added an appearance on Juvenile's "Back that Azz Up" and his own solo debut, *The Block Is Hot*, to his list of credits. If the first five years of Wayne's output seemed exemplary, the first decade of the twenty-first century was even more of a blur. As a solo artist, Wayne released seven mainstream studio albums and at least twice as many underground promotional mix-tapes. Circumventing the established marketing/distribution routes he legitimated himself as an artist making music for the love of craft as much as for the love of money. Wayne was nominated for eight Grammy awards, took home four of them; made appearances on The View, Saturday Night Live, and David Letterman; and had the number one selling album in 2008. He even got shot outs from Obama on the campaign trail and from the oval office. Obama, who'd mentioned Lil Wayne as one of the preeminent

[3] http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8999837/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts; accessed 11/15/10

rappers at a town hall meeting, said later in an oval office interview with *Rolling Stone* that Lil Wayne was on his iPod.[4] Wayne's position in American popular culture is indisputable.

More than being merely popular, Lil Wayne increasingly proves true the marketing adage that all publicity is good publicity by brewing up controversies that keep him headlining media news. Just a few weeks before the March 2013 release of *I Am Not a Human Being II*, Wayne was hospitalized for seizures in Los Angeles. While many speculated the seizures to be drug-related he made several statements that that they were related to his medical history of epilepsy.[5] This hospitalization came just on the heels of his public censure from Emmett Till's family, Stevie Wonder, L.A. Reid, and Jesse Jackson among others for controversial lyrics seeming to take lightly the infamous, brutal murder of Emmett Till. On the remix of "Karate Chop" by future, Wayne raps that he'll "beat the pussy up like Emmett Till." Epic records claimed that the song was an unauthorized, internet version, apologized, and pulled the track.[6] Though Wayne had referenced Emmett Till similarly in an earlier mixtape *Da Drought III,* the earlier reference went without significant comment. On the track "Swizzy" Wayne raps "beatin up your block, yeah I get my Emmett Till on." Although he subsequently stated publically that he would refrain from referencing Emmett Till of his family in the future, Pepsi dropped him as the spokesperson for their DEWeezy, an ad campaign for Mountain Dew.

---

[4] http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/17390/209395?RS_show_page=6, accessed 11/15/ Town hall meeting in GA July 8, 2008

[5] Eric Danton, March 29, 2013. "http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/lil-wayne-says-epilepsy-caused-seizures-20130329. Retrieved 4/17/13.

[6] Randy Lewis, February 14, 2013"Epic to pull track with Lil Wayne's vulgar reference to Emmett Till" http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/posts/la-et-ms-emmett-till-lil-wayne-future-karate-chop-20130214,0,2090424.story; Thomas Conner, February 13, 2013 "Rev. Jackson settles dispute over Lil Wayne lyrics" http://blogs.suntimes.com/music/2013/02/lil_wayne_weezy_future_karate_chop_emmett_till.html

In addition to his controversial lyrics and image, however, there are other reasons that make him an appropriate focus for cultural, music, and black studies scholars. Lil Wayne is important because his entry into the mainstream marked successive and irreversible shifts in the consumption, distribution, and reception of popular music; in the increasingly narrow range of black images of masculinity in popular culture; and in the definitions of black progressive politics. Ironically in a purportedly post-black era of flexible and indeterminate identities, Wayne's musical output also makes important nods to black rhetorical practices and artists, placing him squarely within the black arts tradition. By analyzing the lyrics of Lil Wayne within the context of the post-soul and hip hop eras, specifically 1980 until 2010, we find an artist negotiating the tangle of post-black blackness without subscribing to either of the easily wrought polarities of color blindness or black essentialism.

This dissertation project introduces Lil Wayne into dialogue with black popular music production that often treats post-soul music as part of a definitive cultural break. I argue that the trends rising out of hip hop are not fundamentally pathological or arising from the white boogeyman consumer's desires. Although chapter 3 in Bakari Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* disputes statistics supporting the widespread notion that white teens are the primary consumers, and therefore target audience, of hip hop, most argue that white consumption drives musical production. While discourse that privileges individual subjectivity, historical subjectivity and historical rupture are all part and parcel of important shifts in the academy's understanding of truth and meaning-making, they also solidify a false severance between black music of the civil rights/soul era and post-soul/hip hop eras. These analyses also reinstitute generation gaps inside and outside of the academy. In using Lil Wayne as a window into the post-soul and hip hop era, I aim to demonstrate the complex ways that his music, interrogates, reifies, and

multiplies manifestations of blackness with ironical, multi-vocal Signifyin(g) play. Wayne's music and image operate as both outlier to the tradition and insider through his complex rhetorics of being. Like Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, Isaac Hayes, James Brown, Chuck Berry, or Duke Ellington his multidimensional musical persona provides a lens into the cultural preoccupations of the time period.

Creative works like "Say It Loud…I'm Black and I'm Proud," "What's Going On," and *Shaft* from James Brown, Marvin Gaye, and Isaac Hayes respectively all wove together a complex matrix of blackness in the soul era that was informed by the perceived failures of the civil rights movement, the possibilities that Motown offered for blacks in the mainstream, and the strictures of rising black unemployment. Hayes' record-breaking *Shaft* (1971) soundtrack became the soundtrack of a Blaxploitation film era that created an artistic imaginary for black masculinity that defined the terms on which black men could gain full acceptance in the mainstream. After integration had been settled legally with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and to some extent musically with the crossover success that Motown experienced, blackness itself was no longer considered a musical liability. Instead, as demonstrated by the meteoric rise and fall of Motown, Stax, and Philadelphia International, between 1960 and 1975 marketable blackness must be negotiated continually to ensure crossover success and maintain requisite standards of authenticity imposed on black music.[7] Like other hip hop megastars Lil Wayne's success as a mainstream artist hinges upon his successful negotiation of this same rhetorical space for black masculinity and protest as Hayes, Gaye, and Brown. In his constant negotiation and reconstruction of rap persona Lil Wayne embodies some of the most significant shifts in

---

[7] See Nelson George, *Where Did Our Love Go?: The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), Robert Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997) and John A. Jackson, *A House on Fire: The Rise and Fall of Philadelphia Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004).

the rhetoric surrounding black masculinity, ironically evolving into a version of "post-racial" blackness that echoes the Barak Obama's presidential persona. The irony of performing blackness in a purported post-racial era recalls a persistent figure in black literature and culture and the related theory that undergirds this study: Signifyin(g) and the Signifying Monkey.

A brief analysis of a significant moment in Gates' *Signifying Monkey* is instructive here: "What Ellison's professor did to him was a salient example of Signifyin(g). His professor, subtle and loving as she must have been, Signified upon her young protégé so that he would never allow himself to succumb to the lure of the temptation to *skip* the necessary *gates* placed in the apprentice's path."[8] Was this intentional? In writing about Ellison's professor, was Gates' text slyly prompting readers with its own sneaky Signifyin(g)? Was this skillful rhetorician performing his own tricky magic as he wove together a theory for and from black rhetoric? Here, he seemed to be reminding readers with his own triple voice: (1) we can't skip gates, can't circumvent the obstacles to quality scholarship; (2) we can't skip Gates, can't ignore Gates himself as one of the many voices on Signifyin(g) in black arts; (3) and lastly we can't Skip Gates, reminding us perhaps like a swaggering Soulja Boy that "Nope. You can't do it like me."[9] Here, Gates is the teacher, the signifier, and the one who must be signified on, in this, perhaps unconscious, channeling of Ellison, and the intersection of formal and informal education on rhetorics, the flexibility of interpreting Gates' text creates its own moment of rupture and plurality. So, gates and Gates become a hurdle, door, and/or both. The point of this circuitous introductory commentary is that reading black cultural texts through these Signifyin(g) moments help us to better understand the multiplicity of dynamic and diverse

---

[8] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 65, emphasis mine.

[9] Deandre Way, "Crank That"

ways "blackness" is made in dialogue with itself and other cultural discourses. By Signifyin(g) through analysis on black and white cultural artifacts and icons in the U.S. with the playful seriousness of the Signifying Monkey, I intentionally imagine blackness as a productive realm and race as hugely relevant in U.S. politics and culture. In addition to adding to the body of hip hop scholarship, this dissertation most importantly exists contrary to the prevailing notions in American popular culture that race talk is passé at best and racist at worst.

The musical legacy of black folk traditions necessarily invokes the legacy of black literary arts and criticism, both formal and vernacular. As Gates' *Signifying Monkey* and other critics of black literature consistently slide into jazz and blues metaphors and allusions, discussions of black music and black letters can easily be seen as indistinguishable modes of black rhetoric that employ similar tools. Gates importantly demonstrated the ways that Signifyin(g) as a set of rhetorics was used by black writers within the canon of black literature. Although, Signifyin(g) resists definition, this study will focus on what could be considered three subsets of black Signifyin(g) practice that point directly to its use as political and ontological rhetoric. These subsets, used throughout the lyrical analysis of Wayne's production, are pun, insider knowledge, and self-reflexive revision. I will further demonstrate how his rhetorics of being function as political rhetorics in direct relationship to material and psychological allocations of power. Taking Newton's famous definition of power as "the ability to define phenomena and then make it act in a desired manner,"[10] this study begins with the multiplicity of ways that Lil Wayne defines himself in order to resist oppressive definitional architecture.

Usually when we think of appropriate subjects of sustained inquiry in a scholarly

---

[10] Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 61.

monograph, either in black studies or black music specifically, we look to the seminal figures and organizations that were elemental to mainstream conceptions of black struggle and progress. Artists central to formally defined eras of struggle like freedom singers and the civil rights movement, soul singers and Black Power, funk and Afrocentricity, spirituals and the antebellum era, also are highlighted as the key figures in black music. Equating blackness with struggle contributes to minimizing the significance of black pop music. In the anthology *From Jubilee to Hip Hop*, editor Kip Lornell indicates that "struggle is arguably the most fundamental theme in African American culture."[11] This indicates that throughout the text social issues will take precedence over purely historical or musical treatises. This also indicates that pop musicians, musicians that aren't considered significant black firsts, or musicians that do not resonate as black musicians in the collective struggle for black people may not be included. Correspondingly black male rap artists, who fit all three categories, aren't a topic of much discussion in this text, even though there are several pointed references to the significance of the genre. This narrowed lens highlights the continued legacy of authentic black music as being defined by its articulation of "positive" blackness in direct service to black struggle as defined by the era's black political leaders.

This study is indebted to aspects of the cultural studies work and literary analysis of Henry Louis Gates. In applying Signifyin(g) to black literature, Gates adapted linguistic models and data from black speech communities,[12] providing an approach to texts that

---

[11] Kip Lornell, ed., *From Jubilee to Hip Hop: Readings in African American Music* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, c2010), ix.

[12] As he rightly notes, in several places in *The Signifying Monkey*, the linguistic models from Geneva Smitherman, William Labov, William A. Stewart, and J.L.Dilliard were key to his analytical approaches to texts. These linguists also play a foundational role in my understanding of Signifyin(g) practices.

acknowledges cultural history and rhetoric as essential to meaning-making. Among hip hop scholarship Baraka Kitwana and S. Craig Watkins inform my approach to the culture beyond the music. Both authors analyze rap as a function of complex negotiations among individual black artists, black communities, industry dictates, and mainstream consumers. Finally, the mark of Houston Baker's texts on blackness, blues, and poetics[13] and Imani Perry's *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* are imprinted on this project. In addition to the ways that they build on prior studies and privilege the black community as a site of revisionary and creative promise, they attend to the development of modes of analyzing the aesthetics and poetics of black music.

Writing in the 1930s, philosopher and "New Negro" champion Alain Locke argued that "One of the hardships of Negro music today is that it is too popular. It is tarnished with commercialism and dust of the marketplace," saying that these first black popular musicians were in "commercial slavery."[14] Clearly the contemporary notion that commercialism is the enemy of good music is by no means new. Both black and white critics of black music took aim at the popular with the assumption of its degradation. In using Lil Wayne as a primary focus of this study, I intend to address the issues that make us think that commercialism necessarily promotes inauthenticity and represents a watered down blackness. In doing this, I take Gates' definition of blackness as style, that doesn't preclude dialogue with U.S. culture writ large. As he states: "The blackness of black literature is not an absolute or a metaphysical

---

[13] Additionally, Baker's texts provide self-reflexive discussion of the role of academics in the black community. *Afro-American Poetics: Revisions of Harlem and the Black Aesthetic*, *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era*, *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy*, and *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* were particularly key in developing my research.

[14] Alain LeRoy Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968), 4.

condition, as Ellison rightly maintains, nor is it some transcending essence that exists outside of its manifestations in texts. Rather, the 'blackness' of black American literature can be discerned only through close readings. By 'blackness' here I mean specific uses of literary language that are shared, repeated, critiqued, and revised."[15] This study focuses on the linguistic and rhetorical markers of ethnic, racial, national, and regional affiliation as they are produced and consumed. I intend to revise the image of Lil Wayne as merely a product of hip hop's hyper-commercialized industry and demonstrate the ways that Wayne embodies the Signifyin(g) Monkey as a skilled and intentional participant functioning within a foregrounded legacy of black arts production.

My dissertation is sub-divided into two parts and has six chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. In Part I, *Black on Both Sides: In-group Cultural Rhetorics in Practice,* I demonstrate the poly-vocal rhetorics used by Wayne and the ways this language is (mis)heard by listeners and critics. In the academy, post-structuralist narratives of being that acknowledge the slippery power of language to order, revise, and indeed create reality have disrupted earlier readings of texts that assumed undisturbed paths between authorial intent and reader comprehension. Still, I argue that there is meaning in the (mis)readings. Misapprehensions, like mutual understanding, are guided by an individual's rhetorical literacy in concert with wider, shared cultural logic. By using virtual and actual listening communities, this part demonstrates the way meaning is both a shared experience and an individual creation. Chapter 1, "Charting the Waters," will provide a review of the scholarship of hip hop studies and its relationship to the construction of hip hop's identity as commercial *and* black. This chapter will discuss the trends, topics, and methodologies being used in the field of hip hop

---

[15] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 121.

scholarship through the analysis of the major authors and significant outliers to the traditional canon. The scholarship on hip hop is diverse and dynamic: single chapters in larger arguments about black culture or music; brightly colored anthologies of largely unrelated essays; hip hop feminist readers and texts; books with a sociological bent focusing on listening communities; the exceedingly rare text that centers on formal music characteristics, a solo artist, or extended textual analysis; and texts that focus on rap aesthetics and poetics. Black Studies scholars far and wide weigh in on the music; yet, it seems that many black music scholars rarely seem to perform extended analysis. Like the lacunae in scholarship on black popular music around Motown, classic blueswomen, or Michael Jackson, hip hop is often loathed, loved, or left to general interest books.

This lack of coherence is underscored by hip hop's homelessness in the academy. Although most of its scholars are affiliated faculty within African American or Black Studies departments, many journalists and industry insiders have written what are considered foundational texts within the area of study; Bakari Kitwana, Jeff Chang, and Nelson George are ready examples. Interestingly, neither music nor pop music scholarly journals have done much publishing on the topic.[16] In that regard, it seems to be the case that the scholarship itself reflects the tensions around authenticity that are well-documented in the music. It's not surprising that an overwhelming number of books on hip hop have been written by journalists

---

[16] Considering the cultural import, the explosion of rap music in the 90s and early 2000s, and the controversial deaths of Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur, *Popular Music and Society* has very few articles on hip hop appear in the these decades. Its status as a subgenre or a music that is perceived as negatively charged and representing disaffected youths doesn't seem to be the reason for this absence, however, since a special issue was dedicated to Kurt Cobain and Grunge in the summer of 1995. Even as late as 2005 less than ten articles in the journal have discussed hip hop culture in the US. Rap doesn't fare much better in the established black musicology journals either. Combined, hip hop, R & B, and pop from the US are topics of less than five percent of the articles in *Black Music Research Journal*.

rather than black scholars in the formal academy. As a genre steeped through and through with anxieties about authenticity, industry insiders with direct contact to artists hold more sway on the mic than black studies scholars. Although books by artists themselves have not yet become standard choices for evaluating music, scholars often look to artists for a legitimizing forward or blurb and never hesitate to include any interaction they've had with prominent artists. In contrast, this trend is not seen in other pop music scholarship.[17] As the anecdote from Gates suggests, academic criticism can, perhaps should, embed itself in the rhetorical practices and logic of musicians. Being embedded in practice, however, should not substitute for extended, thorough evaluation. Chapter 1 will also provide some potential pitfalls of these analyses and outline future productive directions for the field.

Chapter 2, "Signifyin(g) Weezy," highlights Wayne's use of Signifyin(g) and engagement with shared tropes of black performance. By looking at his albums *Tha Block is Hot, Tha Carter III,* and *Rebirth,* I will argue that there is a consistent black presence in the Wayne's rhetorical strategies and musical production. Taken together, these three albums represent Lil Wayne's first, most popular, and least rap-centered albums. Looking at the arc of his work over the first decade of his solo career, this chapter will intend to fill the void that the first chapter brings to the fore; namely, that in occupying a contested space in the academy, hip hop scholarship has traditionally restricted itself primarily scholarship that could easily be marketed to large survey courses for undergrads. It would be easy to argue that Mos Def, The Coup, dead prez, Talib Kweli, K'Naan, and Immortal Technique fit into the category of "street-conscious"[18] black rap, explicitly identifying with their race and a collective black

---

[17] See Walser, McClary, and Lipsitz.

[18] Street-conscious is used to represent an extension of Black Power. While both "street" and

struggle even as they sell to wider audiences. In "Mr. Nigga," Mos Def articulates that black people still exist in same oppressive historical binaries created by slavery even when we have climbed the ranks of economic class, "If white boys doing it, well, it's success/When I start doing, well, it's suspect/Don't hate me, my folks is poor, I just got money/America's five centuries deep in cotton money/You see a lot of brothers caked up, yo straight up/It's new, Y'all living off of slave traders paper."[19] These artists who consistently articulate their existence as black and identify explicitly and unequivocally with political resistant ideology are often less successful in the white market. White youth seem more likely to buy an album that is vaguely "street," one that talks about "everyday hustling" in a way that they can apply to their pizza delivery hustle or X-Box Halo hustle. Gilroy notes, "Today, we are told that the boys, and the girls, are from the 'hood—not from the race."[20] It could be argued that this articulation of "street" itself *is* the commodity, that rappers are more successful to their majority white audiences if they articulate a non-political stream of images and black identity that confines them safely to an authentic hood, in a galaxy far, far away. Perhaps, unlike Mos, one could cynically call these *Hip Pop* artists, black on one side, articulating uncritical, mainstream politics with a "street" accent. There is considerable evidence to support both of these claims, but studying the music itself seems to reveals other "hidden histories."[21]

Rap, like any other expression of black people, resists simplistic definitions. Consistent

---

"hood" are symbolic markers referring to an identity that intentionally affiliates with and affirms both the existence and humanity of Black people without significant wealth or political influence.

[19] Mos Def, *Black on Both Sides*, Rawkus/Priority 112905 (CD), 2002.

[20] Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, eds, *That's the Joint!: The Hip-hop Studies Reader* (New York : Routledge, 2004), 89.

[21] George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

with the black aesthetic tradition of Signifyin(g), wildly successful artists also rep black lyrical power by inverting and repositioning U.S. cultural references, previously raced for whites only. While this Black Nationalism[22] articulates a "racial essence," it seems willing to incorporate whiteness into its articulation of selfhood. Without losing racial borders this turn in Black Nationalism acknowledges that whiteness can be included in a black aesthetic without it becoming "diluted," it is still in essence black. Alim states that "foregrounding the streets at the site, sound, and soul of hiphopological activity allows one to gain a more thorough understanding of the origins and sociocultural context of hip hop culture."[23] Like The L.O.X., Carter proclaims that he is street, but he isn't confined by a mechanistic understanding of "street" or Black that restricts him to using street-specific references. Chapter 2 focuses not only on the type of references Carter uses to refer to himself, but how he uses these references. Carter's music indicates that, while he stubbornly articulates alliance with the streets he also increasingly redirects the mainstream image to flow through his music. Thus, while we see a clear increase in the proper noun references to wider publics and non-black culture those references are rarely the point; his redirection points listeners back to himself and the hood.

Chapter 3, "More than a Man," addresses hip hop gender-making as a process and sum of actions by and on a body in mainstream music production and consumption. This chapter emphasizes how competing and contradictory rhetorics of racialized power, gender ambiguity, and popular expressions of resistance are neutralized and what is at stake in hip hop

---

[22] I use Black Nationalism to represent the present condition of Black people in the U.S. as linked to a historical condition of being politically outside of the protections of U.S. citizenship. This does not eliminate that possibility that some Black people have been able to migrate into political citizenship. I only claim that the Black Nation was explicitly separate politically and that separation was never explicitly overcome.

[23] H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 390.

scholarship's preoccupation with "hypermasculinity." In questioning the way the terms "hypermasculine" and "misogyny" are assigned so casually to hip hop and hip hop artists I don't deny that sexist and offensive lyrics exist in Wayne's music. I argue that critics rightly charge hip hop artists for creating scripts for gender that would be wildly oppressive if they were enacted. Without excusing this rhetoric or rationalizing it as creative freedom, this chapter looks at the lyrics themselves and reads alternative possibilities of being. This chapter highlights the slipperiness of the most ostensibly stable constructions of race, gender, and masculinity. Here, I demonstrate masculinity is something that must be strenuously guarded in contemporary hip hop even as those boundaries are tested over and again by Lil Wayne's shifting rap persona and lyrics.

Part II, *Mapping the Black Body: Who We Are When We Are Here*, moves to an evaluation of space and place as articulated through Wayne's music. This highlights Wayne's use of figurative language and black rhetorics, as established in the first section, demonstrating his musical affiliations and identity construction of self in relationship to nation, region, and city. As the first part looks to outline the way meaning is made and shared among communities, this part looks to understand the ways that Wayne articulates and engages with historically and geographically circumscribed identities. Chapter 4, "Race and Replacement," will address Wayne's interaction with the historical and musical space of New Orleans. Pinpointing New Orleans as birthplace of jazz probably obscured more about the fluidity of musical creation than it illuminates. Still, the unique racial history of New Orleans made the city an ideal space for musical innovation. According to Monson, the already "unusually diverse mixture of cultural influences" was combined with the formal collapsing of creole and black identities into black as a function of Jim Crow legislation. Although this legal shift didn't mean that people immediately started jamming together, but specific musical differences

between black and Creole bands fostered a productive mixture. The black string and brass bands privileged "blues-drenched" aural transmission, while the Creole bands favored "instrumental virtuosity, musical literacy, and training in classical music."[24] It's easy to see how improvisation, a fundamental element of jazz, could arise as more emotional and intuitive blues mixed with more structured and technical classical training. The creation of a cadre of hip hop's megastars is a less clear path. This discussion highlights the ways that musical mixture, identity, and innovation are outcroppings of specific legal and material realities of place.

In addition to being a historical site of musical, cultural, and national flux, black New Orleans was plagued in the hip hop era with upsurges in violence, political corruption and neglect, unemployment, and police ineffective at protecting or serving. Like the two chapters after it, this chapter will map Wayne onto New Orleans, not just through his intentional shouting out his city, but will discuss the particular economic and social realities of the city that led to the energetic entrepreneurship and stylistic choices of Young Money, Hot Boys, and No Limit.

Chapter 5, "City of the Soul," analyses the construction of the multiple citizenships represented in the contemporary U.S. as citizenships in terms of acceptance and rejection. Citizenship is at heart a philosophical question, and the rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion that is often mediated by the federal government is perhaps more broadly thought of in terms of identity. What part of the larger community do we claim as our own? What do we question? What do we reject? Historians are increasingly discovering, "a reconsideration of race, gender, and class—a consideration of hierarchy in any form—complicates the idea of community, the

---

[24] Lornell, *From Jubilee to Hip Hop, 147.*

idea of an organic society of any sort."[25] The South is exemplary as a study in hierarchy and community in the U.S. Not merely because of the enduring legacy of slavery, but also the contested legality of citizenship status and legacy of the vanquished Confederacy. Here I argue that to be Southern and participate in its lineage of citizenship is to negotiate a relationship to the Confederate loss and the Southern aesthetic. Instead of turning away from markers of Southernness and Americanness, often black artists from the region negotiate them both. Black Southerners lay claim to a history that is both theirs and not theirs. This historical memory is a palimpsest with the shadows of slavery and the Confederacy always lurking. As Cobb writes, for blacks in the South, this understanding of place and identity is "in the wake of the civil rights movement, a hitherto muted or suppressed attachment to their southern roots led many African Americans…to acknowledge the South, for all its cruelties and unpleasantness, both as their 'home' and a primary source of their identity."[26] As might be expected of a White South trying to rid itself of the association with the negative images of Southernness in the hip hop era in "2001 the percentage of blacks in the South who identified themselves as southerners was actually slightly higher than that for whites."[27]

Whose South? Whose America? "Mine." "Theirs." "Ours.' All seem to call out simultaneously from the lyrics of today's Southern rapper. Far from being unaware and uncritical of the complicated identity of "Southern," rappers articulate a nuanced projection of citizenship, reflecting the past and present identity as a black Southerner. We could see them

---

[25] Fred Hobson,ed., *South to the Future: An American Region in the Twenty-first Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, c2002), 4. Other Southern Studies authors like Hornsby and Woodward are also central to the revision of the Southern image.

[26] James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 260.

[27] Ibid., 263.

not only in the context of black masculinity, but in the specific locality and identity of the black South. Echoing white articulations of Southern citizenship, black artists often align themselves with the aesthetic of the region. As goal of this chapter is to restore to the narrative, as Genovese does, the complexities of the southern experience as relational, especially to actors that have been worn flat by caricature. This chapter will discuss the *Southernness* of Hip Hop through its adaptation of this Southern aesthetic, as defined by the emphasis on place and the Southern Gothic.

Chapter 6, "Citizen Wayne," deals with Wayne and the particularity of the U.S. in lyrics and symbolic visual iconography. Originality and particularity in cultural production was not just an anxiety within black arts, but an pervasive anxiety in the composition of nationalist music in the U.S. Gates discusses Du Bois's and Dunbar's preoccupation with creation of original, free, unique, authentic black expression,[28] but this similar trend was seen in the preoccupation of American literary and musical scholars as well. Among others, Copeland demonstrates this anxiety of representing the newness of the New World.

Published two years apart in 1948 and 1950, *The Arts in Modern American Civilization* and *Virgin Land* respectively are seminal texts in American Studies, providing scholars with unique methodology for analyzing American cultural production. As Americans exited World War II victorious, the time seemed particularly appropriate for more sustained analysis about what it meant to be American and how that unique identity might be represented in the culture we consumed and created. It is no surprise that as Americans seemed plagued by an enduring legacy of racism and exclusion that there would be a desire for scholars to attempt to provide narratives that demonstrate cultural coherence (even perhaps redemption and heroism) and

---

[28] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 114-118.

ideology that could rest in non-controversial explorations of the past. This tendency towards corrective analysis seems more evident in Kouwenhoven's text than Nash's. It is clear from the Kouwenhoven's first chapter that he is constructing a narrative of America that is first distinct and second ennobled. In his estimation of American artists "not only modified and obstructed the traditions carried over from Western Europe but which contributed directly . . . to the evolution of new forms."[29]

This desire of the foundational scholars in American Studies to promote the creation of art that embodies the particular or analyze artistic production through a nationalist construct is also historically evident in both black art and black protest. How black thinkers and scholars understand patriotism, citizenship, and nationalism has influenced protest rhetoric from its earliest moments. The evocation of markers of U.S. identity have been tropes of black protest since Martin Delaney, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth spoke used the newly-minted markers of the republic to implicate slaveholders hypocrisy in the American experiment. Correspondingly, it is useful to use a frame that acknowledges the pervasiveness of both race and nation as foundational narratives of black American identity and art. As, Nelson George writes, "It is also essential to understand that the values that underpin so much of hip hop–materialism, brand consciousness, gun iconography, anti-intellectualism–are very much by-products of the larger American culture."[30] George provides a useful critique in that he evaluates the art on its own terms and without considering it alien. In the film Tupac Resurrection, Shakur says "America is Thug Life. What makes me saying 'I don't give a fuck' different than Patrick Henry saying 'give me liberty or give me death'?" Tupac Shakur. Hip

---

[29] John A. Kouwenhoven, *The Arts in Modern American Civilization* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1967, c1948), 3.

[30] Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Viking, 1998), xiii.

Hop music is representative of the possibility of black agency within the "fully American" U.S. nationalist identity.

While blacks might have rejected the practices of the nation, I argue that many articulated an identity situated within the U.S. as nation and its founding ideology and symbols as redemptive. While pop artists generally and southern hip hop artists, in particular, have been marked as outside of black protest traditions, a textual analysis of their lyrics, musical form, and visual rhetoric demonstrates their representation of this core premise of black leadership and resistance. This is not to elide the popular and political. Rather, here I intend to evaluate the ways that artists participate in conceptualizations of self in relationship to their nation. As V.P. Franklin aptly notes, "there is a need for the members of the Hip Hop generation to learn the hard lessons from their more politically aware predecessors."[31] How do the ways that artists construct identity in ways that perhaps mirrors traditional black political leadership and breaks away from other black musicians? As Dimitradis points out in his ethnography of youths responses to hip hop music, hip hop is both a dangerous and productive space for knowledge-, identity-, and nation-building.[32]

By highlighting rappers from the U.S. South, specifically Lil Wayne, OutKast, and Jeezy, I will demonstrate the ways that they revive two contradictory legacies of place. I will demonstrate the ways that artists negotiate black Americanness and evoke markers of U.S. affiliation to charge the government with neglecting its citizenry. Chapter 6 will also

---

[31] V.P. Franklin, "Jackanapes: Reflections on the Legacy of the Black Panther Party for the Hip Hop Generation," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 559, http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed November 9, 2010).

[32] Greg Dimitriadis, *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

investigate the more fully the ways that hip hop generally, and Wayne specifically, engages with the particular brand of Americanness that was built and sustained in the eighties.

The conclusion of my study, "Post-Black Black American Nationalism," returns again to the question of black political leadership in concert with black cultural arts and the continued struggle for blacks to achieve basic human rights. Ironically, this hip hop era, named after perhaps the most racially encoded genre, has also been considered by many to be the era of post-blackness, a period in American history where the significance of Du Bois' color-line becomes riddled with qualifications. Obama's election was seen by many, as the capstone on this new architecture of racelessness. In his 2004 Democratic National convention speech, one that many saw as catapulting Obama into mainstream consciousness, Obama's statement "There is not a black America. There is not a white America…" characterizes the rhetoric of erasure that many equate with post-racial rhetoric. Though his earlier book, *The Audacity of Hope,* firmly asserted that we were not in an era of post-racial politics or a color-blind society[33], Obama's crossover appeal and successful bid was inextricably linked to his invocation of national identity in lieu of racial identity. As Asim notes "in many ways, the path to success pursued by Prince, Michael Jackson, and black performers who have followed their trail anticipated—and helped pave—the road that Obama traveled on his way to the White House. What's more, the world they describe—one free of racial obsessions—closely resembles the American society that Obama calls for and that his followers enthusiastically applaud."[34] This study investigates the stakes and possibility of this identity performance, or

---

[33] Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 232.

[34] Jabari Asim, *What Obama Means: …for Our Culture, Our Politics, Our Future,* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 22.

"racial transcendence," as Clayton and others describe it. Further, although to not at least make cursory note of Obama's race would seem conspicuous, often the significance of Obama's performance of racial identity is disregarded. Scholars acknowledge that "we have black and white combined in Barack Obama as a person and an orator",[35], but focus analyses on the public reception of Obama as the primary site where race is constructed.

his conclusion takes the identity construction of hip hop artist Lil Wayne in *I Am Not a Human Being I and I Am Not a Human Being II* and compares them to the rhetoric in speeches outlined by Barack Obama in his 2008 bid for presidency and employs both rhetoricians as a model for understanding the complexities of the new rhetorics of black progress and Black Power in the twenty-first century. Since post-racial frameworks for being rhetorically isolate blackness as a historical identity and racism as existing primarily in a bygone era, both Obama and Lil Wayne ironically perform "post-racial" blackness. This chapter highlights the dramatic shift both Lil Wayne and Obama underwent to reshape their public personae into a more contemporary "post-racial" black masculinity while still maintaining the requisite markers of black authenticity.

---

[35] Wolfgang Mieder, *"Yes We Can": Barack Obama's Proverbial Rhetoric* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 116.

Chapter 1

Charting the Waters: Literature Review and Analysis

Perhaps because of having faced a legacy of continued exclusion, marginalization, and derision in the academy, black studies and popular culture studies scholars are more sensitive to the sometimes arbitrary power of anthologies, textbooks, and collections of essays to stabilize, formalize, and certify a subfield's parameters. The creation of "readers," intended primarily for large sections of undergraduates, marks seminal moments in disciplinary formation within the academy, and the contents of these texts reflect preoccupations and politics in the field. These texts also symbolically reveal that a cultural artifact, an era, or a people can finally be understood, that the subject has moved beyond a formulation stage and that a constellation of thought can emerge from the galaxy of scattered writings. Several seminal readers published in the first decade of the twenty first century demonstrate, at least in part, the relationship of black studies, black music studies, and hip hop studies.[36] Nathaniel Norment Jr.'s *African American Studies Reader* (2001, 2007) represents various approaches to and formulations of black studies. The reader also represents an intentional desire to stabilize a contested past and an uncertain future of the discipline. Written in 2006, Norment's final chapter, in the second edition, is a charge to practicing scholars and the emerging scholars of the next generation. This charge makes evident the continued secondary position that black arts, literature, and music occupy in this formative text, "There has been a paucity of real, structurally related research that has come out of AAS in the past 40 years—a betrayal of its ORIGINAL purpose and the work done by leading figures like DuBois, Woodson, Cox,

---

[36]Nathaniel Norment, Jr., ed., *African American Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby, eds., *African American Music, an Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2001), and Kip Lornell ed., *From Jubilee to Hip Hop: Readings in African American Music* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010).

Frazier, Drake, Cayton, Johnson, Davis, and even the cultural and aesthetic scholars like Harold Cruse, Addison Gayle, Jr., Amiri Baraka, Hoyt Fuller, Marimba Ani, Sterling Brown, Michelle [sic] Wallace."[37] A discussion of missing scholars from any list of "leading figures" would eventually lead to the fog of preference rather than an indisputable canon. However, for the purposes of this study it's important to note the absence of women, musicologists, and historians of black music as producers of "structurally related research."[38] Even Michele Wallace seems to be an afterthought. This overlooks the cultural work that black music, specifically black popular music, has done that early institutional and legal change could not do—that is create an integrated workspace for black people wherein blacks achieved a measure of autonomy. The international success of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in the last half of the 19th century; the blues women, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith in the decades before the Great Depression; and the jazzmen of that era and the next are just a few examples of how black musicians were able to use musical performance as viable, self-sustaining work during periods of national hostility and indifference.

Norment's particular choices of scholars and disciplines notwithstanding, the lesser extent to which this cultural and aesthetic work is seen as "real" work is additionally evident in Norment's rhetorical act of prefacing the list of cultural and aesthetic scholars with "and even." This indicates the supplementary, as opposed to vital, nature of their work. This is not to indicate some disregard for the arts in Norment, but to represent the suspicion around the relevance of entertainment culture in a discipline "whose mission requires its scholars and

---

[37] Norment, *African American Studies Reader*, 833.

[38] Though Baraka was an early blues critic and wrote *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963), a text situating the relevance of musical expression to cultural identity, he is most often recognized for his own creative work: poems, plays, and political activism.

students be responsible to their communities."[39] Who could disagree with Norment in that the character of black studies is, perhaps rightly, more oriented towards uplift and community action than traditional disciplines? Nevertheless, his charge to future generations of scholars to do "real," where real is often a stand in for sociological, work infuses the works of cultural studies and hip hop scholars, whether or not they are formally tenured within black studies departments. This drive to produce work that is not only socially relevant but restorative has shaped hip hop scholarship and created many of the challenging questions and assumptions with the field.[40] Is hip hop global, black or both? Who is able to speak for the streets that hip hop by and large claims to represent? How can scholars negotiate the music's content and formal characteristics? And are there vital concerns for the negotiation of rap music as art at all (i.e. formal characteristics)? If so, where do these formal concerns stand within a discipline that bears the "responsibility for educating and liberating African American people?"[41] Norment's charge to black studies scholars directly addresses these questions surrounding hip hop and reveals the somewhat unsteady relationship between black studies and hip hop studies.

More than that, after establishing the arts as secondary to social science, Norment directly delegitimizes hip hop: "The only reason such emphasis is paid to it is because of its mammoth role in American cultural economy. The Blues and Jazz have a more organic relationship to the roots of AAS than do hip-hop which is actually a syncretic form of music. If

---

[39] Norment, *African American Studies Reader*, 832.

[40] In the desire for uplift and establishing the priorities of the discipline, we must acknowledge what is lost. The cultural relevance of black sports figures, for example, is marginalized in black academic circles where studies of culture replicate Eurocentric notions of real or high culture.

[41] Norment, *African American Studies Reader*, 834.

we are going to address the now, we have to deal with the then."[42] In this excerpt we see several of the most contented issues central to hip hop: hip hop as cultural syncretism *and* cultural syncretism as a betrayal of origins, hip hop scholarship as motivated by the logic of capitalism, and hip hop as less vital to the project of African American Studies than other black music. However, Norment importantly, perhaps inadvertently, places hip hop music as part of a larger legacy of black popular music where it rightly belongs and encourages scholars of hip hop not to study it in isolation.

Rap music has sustained and revived itself perhaps more than any other black musical form. Its position as black music, though insecure, is acknowledged in two major survey texts that deal with black music from the antebellum era to the present, *African American Music: An Introduction* (2006), edited by Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby, and *From Jubilee to Hip Hop: Readings in African American Music* (2010) edited by Kip Lornell. *African American Music* dedicates a chapter to Hip Hop and Rap, classifying it as a "genre" of black music.[43] The textbook also highlights the significance of MTV and BET, and Garafalo briefly discusses rap labels and music videos in her chapter on music industry history.[44] A small section from Marc Anthony Neal also touches on the possibilities of rap as resistance music.[45] Moreover, Lornell's edited collection includes several chapters that push the relevance of hip hop forward by assuming, as S. Craig Watkins instructs, that hip hop matters. These chapters, rather than justifying it as music and concerning the reader with foundational topics in hip hop, complicate hip hop's identity and black identity writ large. Raquel Rivera argues that hip hop

---

[42] Ibid., 842.
[43] Burnim and Maultsby, *African American Music*, 353-390.
[44] Ibid., 408-415.
[45] Lornell, *From Jubilee to Hip Hop*, 624-637.

is "a culture (mis)understood to be African American cultural property."[46] Cheryl Keyes, in an excerpt from *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (2004), argues that gender analyses should not privilege male voices in rap music. This chapter, which foreshadows T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's feminist methodology in *Pimps Up, Ho's Down: Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women* (2008), argues that women rappers and industry players should be allowed to speak their identities into existence and that their voices should be assessed more thoroughly. Also, in "Black Artistic Invisibility," black composer, William Banfield pushes back against the marginalization of black classical composers historically that has intensified in the hip hop era. His critique reminds scholars of black music that there is still much work to be done, "We got some black Beethovens living up in here, and what's most sad is y'all don't even know it!"[47] Thus, though hip hop may still occupy a secondary position in the academy, its sheer unwieldiness and persistence has assured its position in the black music canon and within key topics in the future of black studies. This chapter uncovers this legacy of unwieldiness within hip hop studies, discussing the trends, topics, and methodologies being used in the field. I also provide some potential implications and pitfalls of these patterns of thought and outline what might be future, productive directions for the field. This chapter begins with a discussion of the tropes of authentication in hip hop scholarship; then, takes up a thorough discussion of other prevalent themes in hip hop scholarship, particularly focusing on those that are most vital to my research; and finally discusses some of the notable outliers in the canon and the new models for scholarship that they provide.

Jay-Z's lyrics in "Do It Again sum up the desire to authenticate the academic: "Don't

---

[46] Ibid., 278.
[47] Ibid., 335.

talk to me bout MCs got skills. He's alright, but he's not real. Jay-Z's that deal." Journalists and the stories they tell about hip hop culture are often counted among the most referenced and revered texts in hip hop studies scholarship. Nelson George's *Hip Hop America* (1998, 1999, 2005), Kevin Powell's *Who's Gonna Take the Weight?: Manhood, Race, and Power in America* (2003), Patrick Neate's *Where You're at: Notes from the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet* (2004), Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005) and his edited collection *Total Chaos* (2006), Touré's *Never Drank the Kool Aid* (2006), Nik Cohn's *Triksta* (2005, 2007), Natalie Hopkinson's and Natalie Y. Moore's *Deconstructing Tyrone: A New Look at Black Masculinity in the Hip-Hop Generation* (2006), Roni Sarig's *Third Coast: OutKast, Timbaland, and How Hip-Hop Became a Southern Thing* (2007), and Dan Charnas' *The Big Payback* (2010) are some of the texts written by authors whose primary profession was music or cultural criticism for magazines or media outlets. Often the proximity that journalists have to artists lends their work a veneer of authenticity that academics envy and emulate. Ben Westhoff's survey of southern hip hop's history and its contemporary resonance begins with an overt distancing of himself from critics whom he describes as out of touch. He locates these unnamed critics as writing "from the perch," "based in the northeast and engag[ing] in little actual reporting."[48] Although he is probably making reference to music critics from hip hop magazines, like those from *The Source* who notoriously underrate southern rap music, the description of the schism between high and low critics is nonetheless relevant in the thinking of the hip hop critic as scholar.[49] Critics "on the perch"

---

[48] Ben Westhoff, *Dirty South* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), 12.

[49] *The Source*'s distaste for southern artists is seen in other hip hop magazines and has persisted over time. For example, *XXL*'s top 250 song list from 1990-1999 only featured ten southern artists in their top 100 songs. By comparison, Tupac alone had nine of the top 100

aren't down with the people. They, in Westhoff's estimation, are vulnerable to telling less legitimate stories because they are not "reporting," not representing or exposing real life. Thus as we would expect, Westhoff's text is full of juicy bits of exposé and humor.[50] Since he is actually a journalist writing an apologia for southern hip hop, we aren't surprised by the ways that he underscores his position as a teller of the immediate and factual. Essayist and music journalist, Dan Charnas' massive history of hip hop as industry, *The Big Payback,* is an unparalleled addition to this dialogue on hip hop capitalism in his ability to collect such an impressive catalogue of pivotal music industry moments. His argues though that hip hop is essentially American and that the US is increasingly creating space for blackness. As he writes "In the twenty-first century, it's success that's killing Harlem. African-American entrepreneurs, no longer confined to America's ghettos, can now set up shop anywhere they please."[51] It's important to keep in mind that like similar journalistic hip hop histories, Charnas' text reflects the narrative arc of a storyteller rather than the tedious messiness and complications of academic scholarship. By beginning his text with Alexander Hamilton in Harlem and ending with hopeful commentary on Barack Obama's election, Charnas tells a story of largely unmitigated progress and overcoming, where others might see the US as increasingly fractious as the income and education gaps widen.

Of the journalistic and music critic tradition, Nelson George seems to offer cultural critique that relies more on historical and social realities outside of moments in the text.

---

songs.

[50] Him saying that Lil Boosie's voice sounds like a fourteen-year- old girl or that Luther Campbell aka Uncle Luke campaigned for Janet Reno's bid for Florida state attorney are two ready examples: 9, 31.

[51] Dan Charnas, *The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip-hop* (New York: New American Library, 2010), 636.

George's chapter "Gangsters—Real and Unreal" begins with a historical anecdote about the use of heroin by soldiers in Vietnam and the connections of drug use, organized crime, COINTELPRO, and the spread of drug crime and use in the black community during the Nixon and Reagan years. His detailed, if brief, outline traces a timeline from 1971-1990 before engaging his personal connections to gangsta rap or musing about the logic of rap artists' responses to social conditions. Nik Cohn, on the other hand, offers a decontextualized flashback snapshot of history even though he is engaging the same content and historical moment. Cohn writes, "In the ghetto, it's taken for granted that crack was planted, a payback for Civil Rights, and in this case perception is a mutha. Among other legacies, Ronald Reagan deserves to be remembered as the godfather of gangsta rap. Even so, crack was not the core disease. That was hopelessness."[52] Although Cohn consistently brings up his own whiteness with discomfort and discusses moments when black New Orleanians mark him as an outsider, he writes with knowing psychosociological analysis. In Cohn's text we see a more typical journalistic turn that collapses fact, myth, and commentary in a sweeping move towards the universal and emotional. In that turn readers lose the power of the intersection of logos and pathos.

Nelson George relies on the sensational anecdote, unguarded opinion, or joke, but unlike other journalists, the power of his work generally comes from privileging the surrounding literature and relevant history and situating pop culture phenomena within this matrix. "Too Live" is exemplary in this regard in that George begins with an anecdote that reveals his lack of familiarity with regional hip hop culture and the appeal of Luther Campbell (a risky position in a field guarded by insiders). He writes, "to the degree that I denigrated

---

[52] Nik Cohn, *Triksta: Life and Death and New Orleans Rap* (New York: Knopf: 2005), 95.

Campbell's music, I was coming from a place of cultural ignorance."[53] This acknowledgement of ignorance of the logic prompting southern students' responses to Luke is then situated within a context of theorists and creative writers like Ntozake Shange, Michele Wallace, Gayle Jones, and Alice Walker.

George aside, however, most journalistic texts are organized and derive their legitimacy from direct contact through a series of investigations and "real" encounters with rappers and their entourages. This trope, however, is not exclusive to journalistic accounts; this technique, in fact, typifies the authenticated hip hop text.

Rappers, indeed all black performers, are subject to authentication by audiences and are required to represent in some way a predetermined authentic black self. This burden of representation was negotiated as far back as the minstrelsy era, as blackface performers created the first black popular images in entertainment. In many ways, the fact that the worst thing a black performer could be in the twentieth century is counterfeit, hearkens back to minstrelsy and slavery. To perform only for whites indicates that blackness must not go all the way to the bone—that the performer may be merely a costume inhabited by a white body or a docile body controlled by whites. While the earliest critics have discussed the necessity for rappers to above all else "keep it real," they don't always recognize the ways that criticism itself mimics this preoccupation with realness. This necessity for a performer's authentication spills over into cultural criticism of rap music. Writers, perhaps academics more than most, must show their genuine connection to the music, culture, or rap artists. Take for example Dyson's increasing shift towards authentication through the use of rap artists Jay-Z, Nas, and Common as writers

---

[53] Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Viking, 1998), 177.

of introductions and afterwards in his recent texts.[54] Moreover, *Know What I Mean?* is not only dedicated to Jay-Z and Nas, but Dyson introduces each of his chapters, which he calls "tracks," by quoting a popular rap artist mentioning how influential Dyson and his work is. Dyson strategically chooses undisputed icons of contemporary rap music to signify his work's legitimacy.

Furthermore, authors often discuss their introductions to hip hop in a reflection of some formative event or set of events from their adolescence. As Tricia Rose relates her introduction to *Black Noise* "they say that I don't look as if I learned about hip hop in school but I know it like I been studying it. I suppose I learned about hip hop the way most kids from the Bronx did at that time; it was the language and sound of our peer group."[55] Here, Rose's use of the Black English construction "I been" formally reiterates the content of her construction of insider persona. This trope of establishing insider status through direct, long-term contact with listening communities, black culture, or artists occurs frequently as a foundational narrative for hip hop scholars. Consider, for example, Ogbar's graffiti stories, M.K. Asante Jr.'s persona, or Sharpley-Whiting's description of herself as graduate student and fashion model. Of meeting taggers who were "major figures" with "major status," Ogbar writes "I remember the feeling of being close to the *real McCoy*, the brothers from New York who were, simply put, *real*."[56] Asante, Jr., recalling the crisis of black identity by citing the same stark Fanon excerpt that

---

[54] Michael Eric Dyson, Jay-Z, and Nas, *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip-Hop* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2007) and Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daulatzai, eds., *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas' Illmatic* (New York : Basic Civitas Books, 2010).

[55] Rose, *Black Noise*, xxi.

[56] Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar, *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 2. My emphasis.

Kitwana used six years prior,[57] weaves together a text that is thoroughly reflexive, disjointed, and stubbornly personal. He creates a writing persona that is so enmeshed in the subject that there is no distinction between his analysis of the "post-hip-hop generation" and his revelations of self. Likewise, Sharpley-Whiting describes a self-revelatory, justifying, and authenticating moment, positioning herself as outsider/insider. Comparing herself to "video vixens," Trina, Foxy Brown, and Lil Kim, she writes, "We are in the same business of selling illusions, as we move various products."[58] Although it would be perhaps much more intriguing for her to have been referencing her position as classroom instructor in this moment, she is instead recalling her identity as fashion model. This revelation comes after a slightly conspicuous mention of her graduate teaching position at Brown working with Michael Eric Dyson. Later, Sharpley-Whiting asserts, "With my feet in both worlds, I felt quite grounded."[59] In each case the writers straddle street and academy in the introduction of their narratives and often travel through highly intimate moments of personal revelation before and often during the main body of their texts.

Interestingly, these foundational narratives echo traditions in blues scholarship wherein white male critics often introduced their appreciations or criticisms of blues as predicated on and arising out of youthful experiences, long-term affiliations with blues culture, or an investigative, anthropological foray into the real music scene. [60] Even still, we see a pointed

---

[57] They both quote, "Each generation out of relative obscurity must discover their mission, fulfill it or betray it" from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

[58] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Pimps Up, Ho's Down: Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), xi.

[59] Ibid., xii.

[60] Marybeth Hamilton's survey of blues, *In Seach of the Blues* outlines the ways that this distance and authenticity was negotiated in various eras. Also, Samuel Charters' collection of

heightening of the anxiety around authentication for hip hop scholars who must legitimate themselves as both real hip hop heads and intellectuals. Unlike hip hop, Critical blues anthologies know better than to promise to deliver scholarship that is "raw and real,"[61] even though the recording agencies sought after this sound and used rawness as a marketing strategy. As Watkins writes, "A major challenge scholars interested in hip hop face is how to develop a critical vocabulary and assessment of hip hop that earns them respect in two seemingly opposed worlds: academe and pop culture."[62] There is much truth to the statement that scholars must grapple with the development of language and critical assessments. However, his language here is telling. He situates the major challenge as being one of "earning respect." Thus, the cultural critic must be fundamentally concerned with the art of negotiating audience expectations to be truly successful.

This invocation of the insider-outsider position through authenticating moments is related to anxieties of authenticity in rap music. Rap music is often equated with the ills in the black community as if rap either reflects real life, or even more frightening for scholars, as if rap produces an environment that promotes the demise of the black community. The conception that rap music is realer than other music leads naturally to the assumption that rap music is more influential and related to the lived experience of black identity. Tomes on pop music may allude to some negative influences of imagery on youth cultures, but certainly none quite as dire as Kitwana or Asante.

---

travel narratives, *A Language of Song,* exemplifies the necessity of psychic and cultural immersion as each chapter is treated as a personal account of Charters' varied travels, making the book as he rightly estimates "a book about the journeys I took to find the music." (ix)

[61] Jeff Chang, *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), xiii.

[62] S. Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 247.

"'But wasn't Compton dangerous before Gangster Rap?' 'WRONG! Compton was a nature preserve for bunny rabbits…'" Hip hop is often characterized as a cultural movement that defies the label and the idea of label, choosing to live off the grid, only to surface in the contemporary mainstream in its most degraded and manipulated forms. This specific definition of hip hop music as besieged by capitalists will be discussed further in the next section. This image of black culture under siege, however, is central to the way that many writers approach hip hop culture. Over and again authors claim that corporate ownership has manipulated the art form and that imposters are in our midst, minstrels-for-hire, whoring themselves to the highest bidder. The language, in fact, of many texts on hip hop speaks in those terms. For example, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (2002) is literally apocalyptic in its beginning, referencing Baldwin's fiery premonition of the demise of black culture and the duality of Fanon, where culture is analyzed in dichotomous terms of betrayal or fulfillment of destiny. The goal of these crisis texts is to find the seat of problems in black America and pose solutions. This text is very much aligned with the historical and sociological critiques given by Nelson George. Instead of beginning with the rhetoric of hip hop artists, Kitwana begins with "the major sociopolitical forces" that have forged the hip hop generation's ideology.[63] This inclination is much needed in scholarship and allows readers to achieve a measure of familiarity with the major issues concerning black America in the twenty first century. The isolation of these issues as particular to the hip hop generation, leads to generalizations about rap music, black culture, and people that are not supported as well as they could be if the texts were relied on more formal historical and rhetorical analysis. For example, consider the collective effect of the following excerpts: "continuing segregation and

---

[63] Kitwana *Hip Hop Generation*, 9.

inequality have made it *especially* illusory for many young blacks"; "*far more that any* generation, the hip-hop generation was one for which Blackness became associated with drugs and crime"; "Although progress has been made, the older generation realizes that institutional racism lingers. In contrast, the hip-hop generation was socialized on a steady diet of American democracy and the promise of the American dream"; and later, hip hop's "don't-give-a-fuck" mentality literally fosters "racial animosity and hatred" in youth culture.[64] In these estimations of the hip hop generation, the extent to which one generation is uniquely different than and similar to others is lost. Instead Kitwana imagines this generation as being born out of extreme cultural ruptures and shifts, dramatically different from a somewhat romanticized generation of parents. These musical ethnographies would perhaps function better if they incorporated sustained lyrical analysis, throughout. But, even without that, the correlation between lyrics and life is assumed. He even goes as far as to say that 'hood films are different than other ethnic gangster films because they "were by no means attempts to define various ethnic or immigration experiences."[65] This might not be the best way to go about establishing black particularity. The core premise is rooted in a dangerous assumption that black people are less able to translate their own music and life experiences to create positive cultural values. This might be a frightening truth of young people's engagement with music; however, that truth has yet to be successfully validated in the scholarship.

Likewise, in *The Hip Hop Wars* Tricia Rose revisits central debates in hip hop scholarship nearly two decades after her first treatise on the subject, *Black Noise*. For Rose, debates about hip hop often stand in for discussion of significant social issues related to race,

---

[64] Bakari Kitwana *Hip Hop Generation, Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002), 13, 38, 40, 42. My emphasis.
[65] Kitwana *Hip Hop Generation*, 122.

class, sexism, and black culture. Her inclination to move beyond the music to issues of social justice and discrimination is key. Rose is just one of many authors who mention the ease with which the media take up issues in hip hop lyrics and neglect issues in the black community. However, she adds to the chorus of voices equating hip hop with black youth identity. As she rightly notes "no generation has ever dubbed itself the 'R&B generation' or the 'jazz generation.'"[66] Her argument is that hip hop is more important to black youth than jazz or blues or disco or any other black popular music was to black youth. However, without the name, similar charges have been made about the corrupting influence of black popular music on black and white youth by nearly every generation. What she calls an increased "level of single-minded investment," may not necessarily be, even as hip hop music has admittedly infused mainstream culture and identity production in unprecedented ways. Although her text is trying to negotiate an argument that gets beyond the pro/con dichotomies of social analysis, she grounds her discussion in that very sphere. Her argument is explicitly more nuanced than the conservative tirade that blames hip hop for all the ills of black America, but the moral core and urgency of her text, as it relates to the music, sees hip hop music as a complicit in larger structures of racist, historical, systematic disenfranchisement, and oppression.

The same attempt to complicate well-worn arguments about the women in hip hop is seen in Sharpley-Whiting's *Pimps Up, Ho's Down*. Her attempt, however, begins with perhaps too pointedly negative and assumptive questions to engender a balanced judgment. For example, in her introduction she asks: "How have hip hop's lyrics and visual riffs on the acrimonious and sexually charged nature of male-female relationships encouraged the sexual abuse of young black women?" She importantly points out the correlation between the larger

---

[66] Rose *Hip Hop Wars*, 8.

beauty and sex culture industry and hip hop iconography, using traditional, though updated, feminist approaches in her ambition to make feminism do more work for black women. For example, her desire to broaden the scope of her text to condemn the sex tourism industry inadvertently uses singular examples, treating statistics and music videos with the same rhetorical weight, to indict the hip hop generation. She writes, after comparing the increase in black buying power from 2002 to 2004, "This extraordinary wealth generation has allowed them the means and opportunity to act in many respects with the same arrogance and license as their white American and European male contemporaries and the imperialist tourists of Fanon's era." The precise way that this "arrogance and license" is played out is unclear, even the 4.6 billion that she reports blacks spent on travel does little to support this basic claim that the hip hop generation, hip hop, or black men are engaged in increased sex tourism and exploitation, since we aren't told where or how this money is spent.

Like other texts in crisis mode, her text often imagines contemporary hip hop, especially in its most popular forms and the generation it influences, as in need of redemption. As she writes, "though the politics have been tempered by money, hip hop is given a generational relevancy pass that is withheld from feminism." The assumption in her conclusion is that feminism is all the more relevant in a cultural sphere so increasingly polluted by money-driven hip hoppers. She shifts between performance and "real" life without making a distinction. Thus, unlike other hip hop scholars like Greg Thomas who see power in the performance, or feminists who articulate see the use of female sexuality as a route to power, Sharpley-Whiting, relegates women's agency in hip hop as being of a "perverse sort," warning such women against trading in "depreciating assets."[67]

---

[67] Sharpley-Whiting 12, 44, 151, 109, 147.

Similarly, in *Rap on Gangsta Rap*, Kitwana writes, "many young rap artists do not perceive the damage they do with these individualist acts, which suggests how thoroughly America's cult of individualism pervades Black America." The question remains, how far back does this concept of a separate society go, especially in terms of black American culture of community? Rural blues singers, for example, scripted themselves as loners long before rappers did. Even though to his credit he does not assert the black community as "a monolithic one," core values in black community in Kitwana are still seen as pure and subject to white corruption. Black people are assumed to create and express these values in musical culture. In the creation of this concept as rap as representative of, and contributing to, crises in black America, he asserts that "rap music may be the first arena in American society where Blacks have romanticized gun violence--not as a solution for our problems with ruling elite America, but as solutions for our disputes between one another,"[68] This analysis forgets blues singers' preoccupation with violence, even gun violence, as a viable negotiator of conflict. Bessie Smith who promised to "smack down" a wayward lover in one song "bought a rifle, a razor, and a knife" in another and she wasn't the only one.[69] Seeing rap as harbinger of crises necessarily leads to the conclusion that rap music and crises are correlated causally and suppresses the rich legacy of black musicians who created violent personas in their music. Further, this analysis is directly related to the dichotomy between underground and mainstream that scholars create in their assessments.

Hip hop's stunning commercial success and crossover appeal in the 90s and 2000s has caused many writers to periodize the history of hip hop as having a "golden age" that ended in

---

[68] Kitwana *Rap on Gangsta Rap*, 41, 58, 46.

[69] See "Aggravatin' Papa" and "Beale Street Mama."

the mid- to late 90s. As with any attempt to organize the messy and illogical course of history into distinct eras, this attempt to periodize hip hop music is based on aesthetic preference and a romantic predilection for the bygone days rather than culturally transformative or destructive content. This age is said to be marked by the crass desire of typically white music execs to cash in on black culture following the domination of the pop charts by gangsta rap. Watkins' text, *Hip Hop Matters*, begins by his highlighting the genre's expansion into and *as* the popular culture industry, targeting the capitalist project as both anti-black and anti-youth. In his account of the meteoric rise of hip hop to the main engine of a flagging music industry, he documents the appearance of sister industries like fashion and news. He describes Jay-Z as "prob[ing] the psyche, pleasures, and paranoia of the street hustler." There is an attention to the specifics of industry shifts that sets this text apart from others. Importantly he highlights how trends in radio mergers in the 90s led to "greater market segmentation and fragmentation." This fracture created space for hip hop to emerge in its own right as a viable genre that could be marketed for urban formats. Even though he mentions the possibility of Eminem as emerging as antidote to American popular culture's denial of the magnitude of white poverty, a core argument of his text remains that hip hop especially gangsta and hard core rap was "manufactured first and foremost with young white consumers in mind."[70] Ironically, rap's "realness" appealed to youth who felt increasingly emotionally detached from popular culture even when the music didn't represent their experience.

Thus, writers with this view of hip hop culture typically imagine hip hop as progressively being pulled into spheres of increased commodification and as a result becoming less and less relevant. To approach rap music after the "golden age," these writers imagine hip

---

[70] Watkins *Hip Hop Matters* 75, 80, 90, 96.

hop culture to have been functionally diluted by market forces. Kitwana writes that this is an organic prerequisite for mainstream cultural products saying that white appeal "isn't necessarily calculated; it's a cultural and financial imperative. The flip side is also true: the white influence is so great in the hip-hop industry that it would be unnatural and odd, almost freakish, if the final product didn't appeal to white youth."[71] Even though much of his impressive body of work on hip hop analyzes it as essentially black, this argument is useful. In a rare turn for hip hop scholars, he acknowledges that the commercial appeal of black music is natural and not necessarily sinister. His earlier work is not so gracious, calling "commercial rap" "more often than not, contaminated by this process of commercialization" and arguing that "European-American capitalist values have corrupted rap music."[72] Further, often authors like Kitwana, Asante, Jr., and to some extent Rose that implicitly connect rap music to black life and understand the music as directly reflecting and creating social dysfunction also imagine the music as having a pure past in contrast to this toxic present. Asante, for example, sharply critiques hip hop as "polluted" by "minstrel toxins" and situates the redemption of black culture as being primarily situated in a *post*-hip hop generation.[73]

This argument is shared by most hip hop scholars, but is undercut by the history of black music in the marketplace. Returning to blues as a comparative example, classic blues women were wildly successful in their day and incorporated raunchy, violent, and nihilistic lyrics, hearkening back to their days in the vaudeville theater. For example, "Crazy Blues" the first of the race records, for ten times the price of a movie ticket sold 75, 000 copies in the first

---

[71] Kitwana *Why White Kids Love Hip-hop*, 48.
[72] Kitwana *Rap on Gangsta Rap* 11, 41.
[73] Asante, M.K., Jr. *It's Bigger than Hip-hop: The Rise of the Post-hip-hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 12.

month. Questions about authenticity in the market are not new either. Zora Neale Hurston was afraid that newfangled recording technology would destroy pure "Negroness" nearly 100 years ago. Hamilton's work to demystify the blues tradition could be aptly applied to hip hop scholarship. She rightly asserts that "Delta Blues was discovered—or, if you like, invented—by white men and women, as the culmination of a long-standing fascination with uncorrupted black singers, untainted by the city, by commerce, by the sights and sounds of modernity."[74] However, this unvarnished reality of white influence and exploitation in the marketplace is rarely assumed to have had a damning influence on early black music as authentic cultural product. Thus, I think it important to reevaluate the way that we assume the manipulation of the marketplace works. In more recent history we need only to look at the music rappers made when they weren't under the corrosive influence of record industry executives. People who argue too loudly that corporate control misshapes the content of hip hop music, would do well to remember that of black owned and distributed record companies were responsible for such culturally affirming hits as "Bitches and Money," in which Master P tells listeners, probably more than he should that "life ain't nothin but bitches and money" and "We Want Some Pussy," on Luther Campbell's infamous Luke Records. Further, before Rap-A-Lot Records secured distribution deals with Priority and Virgin, it produced the Geto Boys *Making Trouble* and *Grip it! On that Other Level* neither of which comes close to a respectable image of black youth.

Definitions are sneaky, often prompting more questions than they ever answer. Like any artistic expression, music often resists the definitions, genres and classifications we attempt to impose on it. Underground hip hop is no different. Often artists themselves do not

---

[74] Marybeth Hamilton. *In Search of the Blues* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 7, 15, 11-12.

agree whether underground is a genre itself or simply the name for hip hop music that is not yet popular. As hip hop became popular, purists (or those who wanted to be seen as appreciating music that was less tainted by the music industry) labeled themselves differently. Regardless of its musical and thematic content, often, if music doesn't fit with hip hop's established and market-viable categories (gangsta and dance) it is labeled as "underground" by outsiders, essentially making "underground" merely a signifier representing a lack of sales. As a movement from within, it shares many of hip hop's characteristic markers, specifically the intersection of verses, spoken in rhymes over melodic tracks. However, underground artists still can be differentiated from other hip hop musical subgenres, to some extent, by its production style, content and relationship to the music industry. This analysis, however, is functionally absent in hip hop scholarship. Scholars typically write of revolutionary and progressive promise of certain "underground" rappers without analyzing their lyrical content or providing a schema with which we should justify them as conscious.

A key argument in Rose's *Hip Hop Wars* is that hip hop has been nearly ruined since its inception as an organic, community centered, and potentially culturally redemptive enterprise. Like Kitwana, she foregrounds the expansion of corporate influence as the seat of hip hop's degeneration. In some contrast, she challenges the extremes of detractors and defenders for promoting "dulled critical development."[75] In light of this, I respect very much her desire to return the conversation back to questioning and challenging mainstream US hip hop, which is the focus of her new study. The underground is different, but that difference is usually assumed rather than carefully explored. There is refreshing nuance in Rose, for example, but it's not in the evaluation of the underground's progressiveness. It's in the evaluation of society as bearing

---

[75] Rose, *Hip Hop Wars*, xi.

joint responsibility for what are considered black American problems. Nearly every example of a mainstream rapper is negatively charged on the strength of a few snippets of lyrics. Correspondingly, progressive rappers list is also given without through discussion of lyrical content. It's as if those very scholars, with perhaps much more to lose, are immune to the same pressures of the engine of capital.

As anthropologist Clifford Geertz claims misunderstanding comes from "a lack of familiarity with the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs....Understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity."[76] Geertz' schema demonstrates the critical analysis that is necessary in a global multiethnic space to promote understanding. Several key questions remains increasingly significant for scholars of black popular music and are negotiated again and again in hip hop studies texts: Does black culture operate as a unique set of signs? Is hip hop essentially global, is it essentially black, or is the concept of essence irrelevant?

Most scholars agree on the broadest essentials of hip hop's origins. Rap is generally considered to have its beginnings in African-derived musical and verbal traditions. The privileging of verbal dexterity is thought to be linked to African-derived practices in the US like playing the dozens, toasting, and spoken word. Playing the dozens refers to a tradition of competitive joking traditionally found in black speech communities. Also, poets like Gil Scott Heron, Watts Prophets, The Last Poets, and James Brown brought the poetic aesthetics and Black Power ideology to the record. As a part of the Black Arts movement in the 60s and 70s, these poets attempted to develop culturally-affirming politically conscious poems that were recorded over musical tracks. To complicate hip hop's origins, however, Jamaican toasting, or

---

[76] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 13, 14. My emphasis.

speaking over music was another verbal tradition that made its way into the Bronx community through immigration. This toast tradition led to the practice of recording "dubs" or instrumentals of popular music expressly for the purpose of extended DJ toasts. Many immigrants found themselves in the Bronx and contributed to the eclectic and multicultural development of the hip hop party scene. Founding father, DJ Kool Herc, himself a Jamaican immigrant, incorporated "Latin instruments such as congas, timbrales, and cow bells."[77] Both Perry and Ogbar discuss at some length the ways that hip hop's ability to be influenced, exported, and translated does not preclude it from being an essentially black American cultural form. Each author, in fact, quotes Herc's denial of diasporic continuity between Jamaican toasting and US hip hop.[78] While Herc's denial of connection between Jamaican and US black music culture does not definitively prove a lack of influences, it does seem to indicate that the subtleties of individual music forms are more differentiated by practitioners. My work unequivocally sides with scholars like Ogbar, Rose, Perry, and Kitwana who situate rap music within the particulars of the black experience in the US.

H. Samy Alim's, *Roc the Mic Right*, proceeds from a cultural nationalist impulse that theorizes continuity throughout the experience and expression of hip hop culture as a new transnational nation that minimizes, indeed renders obsolete traditionalist formations of nation-states. While he and other scholars like Chang, Lipsitz, and Gilroy often call the hip hop nation *borderless*, they mean the boundaries are not fixed geographically, not that they are all-encompassing. These new boundaries are created and sustained through communities' interaction to create new space for imaginary communities to exist and create. This is not an

---

[77] Burnim and Maultsby, *African American Music*, *356*.

[78] Herc's response to affinities between the two is, "No connection there." Qtd in Perry's *Prophets from the Hood*, 16; and Ogbar's *Hip-Hop Revolution*, 12.

unfamiliar impulse for cultural studies scholars or black studies scholars in particular. Much of what is called Black Art has its roots in articulating a space for being by excavating and reimagining blackness, rehabilitating what was lost in racist constructions of identity. As Schomburg writes, "a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away." However, Schomburg aptly warns against the type of imaginative history (we might call all scholarship some attempt at *imagining* history) that is "over-corrective…apologetics turned biography."[79] Schomburg represents the delicate balance that hip hop scholars must strike in creating social geographies of the music. For, Alim this overcorrection is seen in the essential character of hip hop as being "street" rather than black. However, the extension of this imaginary identity to apply globally to both hip hop music and worldwide listeners is troublesome even when limiting the focus of study to black Africans, black Caribbeans and black Americans. I contend that this brand of cultural nationalism, influenced by a desire to shift the boundaries of art away from a restrictive essentialism, does not succeed in becoming a meaningful category because transnational nationalism obscures the significance of different conditions of oppression in operation within specific nation-states and hip hop nationality does not deal with the multiplicity of nationalities within the US and the art of non-black hip hop artists as a response to the *black Americanness* of hip hop.

Gilroy notes, "Today, we are told that the boys, and the girls, are from the 'hood—not from the race, and certainly not from the nation."[80] Here, he is speaking of the diminished articulation of an identity tied to the nation-state in cultural production. However, advocates of

---

[79] Arthur Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past" in *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Penguin Group, 1994), 61.
[80] Forman and Neal, *That's the Joint*, 89.

this *new* hip hop nationality who are attempting to understand the meaning of music and its dual possibility to function as an oppressive and liberation (and exist in ambivalent degrees in between) may need to question if these artists are indeed "reppin the block" or crudely trying to cash in on a vogue post-black deracialized affiliation. Singh is instructive here. In *Black is a Country*, he writes "One thing is certain: the long civil rights era did not lead to black assimilation into the U.S. nation-state, but to a more complex dynamic of *differential inclusion* in which new forms of black existence were shaped in the crucible of black migration, urban apartheid, and new global imaginings and longings."[81] Hip hop nationality obscures this differential inclusion by minimizing the racial and geo-political identities of its consumers and creators.

By advancing a theory that positions citizens of the Hip Hop nation as "street" rather than racialized citizens of a specific nation-state, artists are able to capitalize on their illicit "street" or "hood" otherness without upsetting their audience with pesky notions of racial constructions in the U.S. Without historical grounding and specificity hip hop Nationality has no response to Eminem when he asks on "Nail in the Coffin," "how can I be white when I don't even exist?" This creation of Hip Hop Nationality mimics a popular Universalist desire to destabilize race without acknowledging what Singh calls the "legacy of racially coded difference itself."[82] This tendency is exemplified by Charnas' assertion that white skin privilege is effectively destabilized by the conspicuous success of black music industry executives and performers.

---

[81] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 52.

[82] Singh "Toward an Effective Antiracism" in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower* ed Marable (New York: Columbia
University Press, 2000), 35.

Additionally, in as with any transnational analysis, the traditional national contexts are incredibly relevant. I pose the same question of hip hop nationals as Paul Gilroy, "How is black life in one 'hood connected to others?"[83] While, I don't agree that this connection is absent, as Gilroy might, I do think that we can and should acknowledge historical and material conditions of difference between one African Diaspora community and the other. Butler claims "indeed the borders of the hip-hop nation are not concurrent with the borders of any nation-state. The culture is international."[84] Do we say then that the Somali artist and artist from Harlem are from the same nation? The reality that this sort of conflation of categories erases is articulated by Somali Artist K-naan: "One day, we were eating dinner ... outside of our window, there was a gunshot. My uncle ducked, and me and my brother didn't flinch. My uncle was like, 'You see the guns here. You have to be careful.' And my brother said, 'What. That was popcorn.' Because in Mogadishu, handguns aren't considered dangerous. You have to shoot something heavy: AK-47s or RPGs."[85] We might question the implications of a US artist claiming to produce globally relevant "street anthems" when all streets aren't equivalent. Proponents of hip hop Nationality cannot ignore the US as imperialist empire and the ways even oppressed people in the US might replicate US imperialism abroad. In "What is Hardcore, Really?," K-naan's meditation on the difference between the streets in Somalia and the streets in Harlem, he exposes the usefulness of maintaining specificity to contextualize resistance, articulating that 50 Cent's gunplay music isn't the same as the resistance music in a country

---

[83] Forman and Neal, *That's the Joint!*, 89.

[84] Indeed Butler's own full-length text does not adhere closely to this formulation of hip hop. His "hip hop theory of justice" is uniquely rooted in constructs of identity that cannot be easily untangled from the particularity of the black experience in the US, especially highlighting the constitution and its framers. See Paul Butler, *Let's Get Free: A Hip-hop Theory of Justice* (New York: New Press, 2009).

[85] Doherty, "Lyrics Case Study: K'naan," par. 5

where "there ain't no police."

Also, as hip hop developed primarily in the US, we can see the influence of multiple ethnicities within the US that belie the usefulness of hip hop as a singular nationality. While Afrika Bambaataa claims that "when we say Black we mean all our Puerto Rican or Dominican brothers" this sort of national equivalence is the same sort of problematic erasure that depoliticizes multicultural universalism.[86] If nothing else there are complicated legal and cultural policies of US citizenship that make categories like Hispanic and black distinct and relevant to situating artistic production. Further, this evening out of identity that claims *it ain't where you from it's where you at* is contradicted by Hispanic artists themselves. As Charlie Chase notes, "You know being Hispanic you're not accepted in rap. Because to them it's a Black thing and something that's from their roots and shit."[87] We might not agree wholesale with this accusation of hip hop's bias, but these are precisely the political questions that hip hop was created to ask, and scholars imagining hip hop as a nation often ignores and obscures them.

Similarly, Rivera makes a case for reevaluating hip hop culture in a way that accounts for the unique social and economic experiences of blacks and Puerto Ricans in the Bronx in relationship to hip hop culture. She highlights several key Puerto Rican contributors to the development of the culture, indicating that hip hop "was often too narrowly identified with an ethnoracial blackness." She argues that contrary to the more fluid and possibility of a more expansive definition of blackness that accommodates Puerto Ricans, MCs and DJs have been expected to justify their presence "within a perceived Black matrix." Further, the extent to

---

[86] Nelson George, "Hip Hop's Founding Father's Speak the Truth" *That's the Joint!* eds Forman and Neal 50.

[87] Juan Flores "Puerto Rocks" in *That's the Joint* eds Foreman and Neal 72.

which hip hop is perceived as an exclusive and narrow genre, for Rivera, is a result of the marginalization of Puerto Ricans in the mainstream, the lack of communities like the Bronx where blacks and Puerto Ricans interact fully, the competing pressure on Puerto Ricans to articulate a non-black panLatinidad, and the lack of Puerto Rican MCs and DJs as compared to dancers and graffiti artists.[88]

Although examples of Puerto Rican participation in hip hop are presented throughout, this article seems to support an argument that hip hop is understood as part of a continuum of "black music." The precise definition of that blackness, or who is entitled to authentically participate *as* black is what her essay is attempting to revise. When she claims that "hip-hop is ahistorically taken to be an African American expressive culture" she is saying that hip hop might be more accurately understood as part of an Afro-diasporic (or black) cultural expression that includes Puerto Ricans. I disagree with her contention that "articulations of class and ethnoracial identities have resulted in the construction of Puerto Ricans as virtual Blacks." The controversy around J-Lo's use of the word "niggas" in "I'm Real" indicates that Puerto Ricans are still not perceived in hip hop as virtually black by many members of the black community outside of the Bronx and that this virtual blackness is highly contingent on individuals and context. However, she makes a convincing case for her argument that hip hop's ethnoracial identity as a narrow version of blackness is heavily influenced by the music industry and the imagined racial binary in the US.

We could argue about the authenticity of the hip hop, whether or not it is *really* black, but there is little argument that it is a thoroughly encoded as black music in US society. One could make similar arguments that black music that is heavily influenced by or performed by

---

[88] Raquel Rivera "Hip-Hop, Puerto Ricans, and Ethnoracial Identities in New York" in *From Jubilee to Hip Hop* Kip Lornell ed, 270, 281.

people who aren't black is not black American music. The music of Stax records, for example, may not have been played, produced, or influenced solely by black people, but few would argue that Isaac Hayes' or Otis Redding's soul music wasn't black music. *Superfly* and *Shaft* were intensely commercial soundtracks for a genre of films named for the perceived hyper-exploitation of the marketplace: Blaxploitation. These films, nonetheless, were also inextricably linked to rhetorical formulations of contemporary black masculinity. To do so, one would have to disrupt notions of race and identity as being fixed which Rivera does. It's an intriguing possibility that Puerto Ricans in the Bronx may have seen themselves as and been seen as part of a black collective, but the vast majority of the US, even as we edge towards the possibility of a post-racial society, is still mired in historical constructs of race.

Similar to the construction of hip hop as nation, is the construction of hip hop culture as fundamentally postmodern. Jeff Chang's collection of essays is consistent in its drive to situate hip hop outside of borders. While the diehard postmodern would reject the notion of canonization and taxonomy, in trying to explain and define postmodernism, scholars often describe hip hop music and hip hop as a genre within the postmodern canon of art. Mostly, it seems, because they have nowhere else to put it. However, postmodern scholars have taught us better than the rest that "the canon is also a network of aesthetic assumptions and social biases—and implicit cultural and economic priorities—built into and reinvoked by the range of texts it includes." Further, "a taxonomy of mutually exclusive categories will also consistently falsify the history of aesthetic innovation."[89] It seems that in an ironic turn, many scholars see hip hop music as so inherently different and *essentially* other that it is impossible to conceive of their place within the traditional canon of black American resistance music. Therefore, hip

---

[89] Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 40, 280.

hop music is defined in terms of a perceived rupture and incompatibility. It seems that merely representing the contemporary black voice or experience as central to a narrative is quite enough for the work to be characterized as postmodern. Peter Kolchin's work on the development of slave identities in colonial America reminds us of the ethical implications of this taxonomy of difference. He argues that in order to justify slavery colonists had to develop an African identity that was *inalterably alien* and unable to be assimilated into American identity.

Black art forms are often defined within the borders of postmodernism in order to attack ideas of black essentialism. However, the continued violence and infringement into and on the creation of resistant black subjectivity and identity requires us to rethink the haste with which a postmodern construct discredits essence. We might say instead, as Singh does, that black culture in the US often represents an autonomous character (while I would argue that this character is not necessarily anti-American) and its artistic productions are neither modern nor postmodern. Race concerns are by nature oppositional to *both* modernist and postmodernist imaginings because the marginalized voice is never intended to be central part of a mainstream academic dialogue in its own terms; in order to be modern, blacks must assimilate as not-quite white. While, in order to be postmodern, blacks are often defined as essentially different and not central to the mainstream academic enterprise OR must reject the concept of a raced (seen as "essential" or "authentic") identities. Since, according to postmodernism, authenticity is hierarchical and outdated, as are terms like "reality."

This argument does not intend to build a universal model for the black American aesthetic; essentialist and universalist constructs are often misused to justify racist constructions of black identity. However, since the institutionalized and hardened identities created during slavery, America has had little trouble racing its black population and the black

population has had little trouble racing itself. It seems contradictory to the autonomy of black art and the supposed ends of postmodernism to assume race not to be constitutive (while not the entirety) of identity or to assume that race or genre itself makes a work inherently postmodern.

In *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy,* Houston A. Baker Jr. claims that DJs and early hip hop artists created "a deft sounding of postmodernism." Fixing on hip hop's "hybridity" he defines hip hop's postmodernity as being "the nonauthoritative collaging or archiving of sound and styles that bespeaks a deconstructive hybridity. Linearity and progress yield to a dizzying synchronicity."[90] Baker is joined by many scholars figuring sampling in hip hop as justification for its place as archetypal postmodern music. According to Dyson, "Sampling is also postmodernist activity that merges disparate musical and cultural forms to communicate an artistic message,"[91] and Schusterman "freewheeling eclectic cannibalism violates high modernist conventions of aesthetic purity."[92] However, authoritative sampling might not sufficiently explain the preponderance of scholars defining hip hop as postmodern. Why is there not the same articulation of Hurston's field work, or any representation of folk art? We might say the same of Jazz, or say that Claude McKay's *If We Must Die* was a remixed sample of the sonnet, both destabilizing and deconstructing. We might also ask when black artistic production or minority arts for that matter don't violate high modernist conventions. In fact, Russell Potter writes that since blackness and modernity are at odds, "it could be said that

---

[90] Baker, *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy*, 89.

[91] Dyson "The Culture of Hip-Hop" in *That's the Joint!*, 67.

[92] Richard Shusterman, "Challenging Conventions in the Fine Art of Rap" in *That's the Joint!* Forman and Neal eds., 463.

all Black artistic movements are post-modern."[93] So, the postmodern critique seems to be the only space for Black arts and Hip Hop analysis. However, the Eurocentric postmodern construction, (even one adapted for ethics) has at its helm an increasingly contested core that obsessively seeks to be relevant to all peoples by becoming increasingly vague and refusing to deal with the implications of extending the logic of its theory. If all Black arts are postmodern, doesn't that indicate that Black art has a continuity that resists mainstream pronouncements upon it?

In *Forever Free*, Eric Foner makes an interesting commentary throughout about the power of the image in establishing collective memory. By interspersing his text with visual essays he highlights the powerful, though inexplicable, relationship between the symbolic and social reality. The image, the gesture, the sign, the word. Newly liberated black people chose to travel because movement was an act of freedom—movement, without objective, without destination was to exercise liberty denied. And Douglass? Who knew better than Douglass, the power of the symbol? "Let a black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S." and the reality would form to the sign." [94] It is culture that completes us. These concrete symbols, schema, artifacts that attach to the indistinct spasms of memory and feeling. We awaken to life, living only through the culture we have pulled into us almost indiscriminately. In turn, what we create bears the mark of its raw materials.

In attempting to determine a more productive method of situating rap music within a historical and material legacy of black culture and analysis it is useful to return to another text by Kitwana. He asserts, "It would take an army of Eminems to divorce the image of hip-hop

---

[93] Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars Potter (New York: SUNY Press, 1995),* 4.
[94] Frederick Douglass qtd in Foner *Forever Free*, 47.

from young Black men, who after thirty years still dominate the art form."[95] This is admittedly arguable. However, he points to an understanding of rap music as black culture. Unfortunately without seeing rap music as the subject of thorough analysis, be it literary, musicological, or historical, there is little theoretical grounding on which to begin to see the music as art or part of the larger conversation with black musical production.

The obvious reality that many historical constructions of blackness have been reductive does not negate the usefulness of a Black Arts aesthetic and the usefulness of racialized identity constructions. In a time when more than ever artists should be able to speak freely about their identity, they seem hemmed in more than ever by the gift and curse of U.S. capitalism. Patrick Neate asserts this "cultural capital" as the most important aspect of Hip Hop that Black American artists must reclaim from the music industry, saying, "However you choose to define hip-hop, it surely should not be defined as a medium through which big business can further oppress the oppressed or exclude the excluded."[96] I add to this the problem of the way we view scholarship and the way academics go about defining rap music.

Perry rightly notes in her *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (2004) that the bulk of scholarship is centered on sociological approaches. Thus, her impetus in analyzing the poetics and aesthetic landscape of rap music is a refreshing addition to the body of work. However, at the same time, because she is writing in this lacuna, a significant portion of the text is spent outlining the way songs operate as creative text generally rather that developing a schema for poetic analysis unique to the subject matter. Also, a significant amount of the text is spent speaking back to the scholarship that uses traditional methods of

---

[95] Kitwana W*hite Kids*, 2.

[96] Patrick Neate, *Where You're At: Notes from the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), 258.

analysis (historical, sociological, and political) since there is not a large body of likeminded scholars against which she can shape her ideas. So, even as she is trying to develop analysis that gets closer to the musical text (and she does), she also is not able to develop purely aesthetic and poetic categories for the music. Further, in her attempt to avoid what she perceives as the confines and reductionism of historical analyses, her analysis of the music tends toward a-temporal comparisons which have both a negative and positive impacts on her study. A-temporal analysis provides a useful overview of the continuity of aesthetic characteristics. On the other hand, this approach may elide differences that were a direct result of shifts in production, technologies, and the marketplace. This analysis shows a striking trend in analysis of hip hop, in that scholarship. Namely, that unlike other popular music analysis, hip hop is generally treated neither as music nor poetry. While Perry ostensibly analyses poetics, she does not incorporate the sustained or comparative analysis of traditional English scholars.

Another significant outlier in the field of hip hop studies is McWhorter's work *All About the Beat: Why Hip-Hop Can't Save Black America* (2008). In *All About the Beat*, McWhorter rightly describes much of the landscape of hip hop scholarship. Scholars often begin with a concept of hip hop as an abstract marker, a magic dreamscape full of black utopian revolutionary promise. Rappers are generally spoken of as poets, griots, or journalistic documenters of real life. Even when authors agree with dead prez's assertion that "it's bigger than hip hop" they often rely on a construction of hip hop as a space that, as Badu sings, is "bigger than the government…bigger than religion." So, McWhorter's argument is different. He is saying that rap itself should not be seen as bad or good, but that it's just music, and as such is not particularly viable as a coherent political movement. This makes McWhorter the logical extension of Watkins who argues that hip hop isn't empowerment music, because, (like,

I think, most transformative high art), hip hop relies on translation and grass roots organizers to articulate and clarify its virtues into goal-oriented action.[97] Structural power, he argues was never a fundamental element of hip hop.

McWhorter's text argues against the majority of the scholarship, by saying that rap is essentially just music and is responsible neither for cultural redemption nor ruin. Although, may go too far in his assessment of the lack of significance of music on culture, importantly, he doesn't restrict the discussion of politics to the usual suspects, artists like KRS-1, Mos Def, or Kweli. He attempts to cut through the genre with broader strokes, demonstrating how the politics of the political fail as policy as often as the self-proclaimed gangstas.[98] For McWhorter, rappers "are not, really, political junkies at all. The politics that they intend when referring to its relationship to hip-hop is actually the personal kind: to them, politics is an attitude."[99] And, of course, to McWhorter, not only is attitude *not* politics, it actually stymies politics by acting as a diversion from the real issues that need to be addressed.

Greg Dimitriadis' *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice* moves beyond more traditional modes of textual analysis. This text is one of the few to move beyond analysis of hip hop music as a cultural artifact. In this text he adds to the discussion of hip hop the influence of ethnography, performance studies, and listener community interviews. Much like Walser's work with heavy metal, this text focuses on the listening community as the site of meaning-making rather than the lyrics of music. Additionally, while many scholars have attempted to mine hip hop for its potential use in educating black students, he actually locates his study within an afterschool program and

---

[97] Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 162.
[98] McWhorter, *All About the Beat*, 33-34.
[99] Ibid., 43.

shifts the discussion from merely being about youth in crisis (which seems rooted in fear) to being an interactive dialogue about what sort of various roles even the same song might play in the context of individual lives. There is the concept in this work that hip hop pervasively and potently influences patterns of thought and behavior, even to the point of developing ontology for its listeners that defies traditional logic. Dimitriadis, however, learns from the subjects of his study, allowing them to demonstrate the different, even oppositional, ways that music operates within culture. This reminds readers of hip hop as crisis to see each symbol and image as subject to misuse and cooptation by the audience.[100]

Paul Butler's work *Let's Get Free* (2009) provides readers an extended look at one social aspect that harms black youth disproportionately, the criminal punishment system. This is not an unfamiliar subject of hip hop scholars. Several authors including Ogbar, Rose, Dyson, and Thomas have investigated the preponderance and significance of anti-police and anti-prison sentiment in hip hop culture. Butler's text is significant in its ability to focus specifically on the logic behind this sentiment. Thereby, he is able to do the work that we expect from the socially engaged critic—to turn sentiment into coherent political action items for combatting injustice. His book outlines what the core tenets of hip hop justice are and systematically explains how citizens can resist oppression using hip hop justice theory.

Finally, what is thoroughly absent in the majority of hip hop scholarship is analysis of the formal musical characteristics. A few writers have attempted this approach in articles, as is seen in the "Ill Tight Sound" analysis of production styles. This musicological approach is not the subject of any full-length study. Another absence in hip hop scholarship is close study of an individual piece, artist, or album. Greg Thomas creates the model and demonstrates the

---

[100] This potential is vital to my analysis of hip hop culture and is a key intersection point for other literary theorists and American studies scholars.

potential of this endeavor in *Hip-Hop Revolution in the Flesh.* Dyson's recent multi-authored collection of essays on Nas' *Illmatic* and his extended work on Tupac Shakur moves closer in that direction. But, even in the former, the articles are not concerted in a way that evaluates the Nas' work in close isolation, and some are tangential to the content of the album, using it primarily as a point of departure rather than the actual focus.

This is particularly interesting if we are to think of rap *as* music rather than looking at it merely from a cultural studies perspective. Music studies scholars historically in journals and full-length texts generally focus on an artists' catalogue, formal musical characteristics, individual pieces, historical period, or region, even when the music is seen as relatively simple (as is the case of most vernacular or folk music). This absence in the scholarship of hip hop demonstrates the lingering perception of rap primarily as lyrics, social commentary, or commercial product. This collapsing of categories where more than any other genre of black music, rap is understood *as* black culture primarily and music secondarily if it is analyzed as music at all. As Jurgen Grant's *Kinds of Blue* demonstrates the usefulness of applying musical idioms to literary study, reading literature as jazz. And, while jazz is generally characterized as instrumental music, Angela Davis' brilliant text on the politics of jazz and blues singers demonstrated the depth of insight and understanding that can result from the careful study of music as literature, or as lyrics. However, neither of these types of study is applied to the understanding of hip hop. Even the most tedious analyses of hip hop falter under the burden of legitimating generalist claims often using too scattered of evidence. Scholars must be allowed and allow themselves the freedom to dwell in the music's particulars at length in order to draw out substantive criticism. The mere claim that rappers do or don't produce a certain effect or another is fundamentally flawed in a landscape with such a richly diverse topography.

Conclusion

In returning to Norment's charge that black studies scholarship should bear fruit in the black community, the anxiety around scholarly authenticity, the analyses of hip hop culture as reflecting and promoting crisis, and the lingering insecurity of hip hop's place within the academy, following the work of literary scholars, music historians, and cultural critics, my work addresses the key issues presented in Guthrie Ramsey, Jr.'s "The Pot Liquor Principle: Developing a Black Music Criticism in American Music Studies." To some extent the work of the following chapters rejects that essentialism should be so hastily discarded, for as Ramsey claims "some exists as powerful displays of human agency, intention, and culture building" and using textual analysis employ signifyin as theory capable of making "blackness as a unit of analysis."[101] I agree with Ramsey that there has been much more academic emphasis placed on the constructedness of race in ways that eviscerate blackness the lived experience.

[101] Guthrie P. Ramsey "The Pot Liquor Principle: Developing a Black Music Criticism in American Music Studies." *Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 214, 217.

Chapter 2 Signifyin(g) Weezy

Reality TV creators have increasingly capitalized on the cultural specifics of novelty and place-based shows that unabashedly rely on mainstream viewers' perceptions of extreme others as odd. A desire to consume this true story exposé media has long been an explanation for the expansion of mainstream hip hop. Although this consumer-based model of motivation cannot fully be denied, this chapter and the next demonstrates that pop culture creators still have the capacity to produce subversive texts even in the midst of a market oversaturated with demand for safe consumption and thereby understanding of threatening, alien others. This chapter and the next figures subversion not as an idealist motivated revolution but as potentiality for genuine expressions of self or subjectivity amidst mainstream generalist, stereotyping trends. Thus, for Lil Wayne to be subversive he would have to resist mainstream pronouncements of the black male gangster persona and move swiftly among various intellectual black rhetorics and pop culture sensibilities. This chapter demonstrates his development of a persona that does just that.

The goals of this chapter are two-fold; first I analyze the use of black rhetorical practices in Lil Wayne's music, demonstrating the function of cultural linguistics. Through this extended lyrical analysis I combine the literary and linguistic methods to evaluate culturally located meaning. Using Lil Wayne's albums *500 Degreez* and *Tha Carter III. 500 Degreez,* and *Rebirth* was chosen as a focus of this study as it truly represents his first solo album. Although it was technically the third solo album he released, it was his first project without the Hot Boys. Lil Wayne debuted as the youngest of the Hot Boys, made up of Lil Wayne, B.G., Turk, and Juvenile. Released to tepid reviews, *500 Degreez* shows Lil Wayne attempting to define a unique persona while struggling out of the long shadow of then far more popular Juvenile with an album title took aim at Juvenile's quadruple platinum *400 Degrees*. In contrast, *Tha Carter III*, to date Wayne's most popular album, represents Lil Wayne's moment of breakout mainstream success.

Although any one of his prolific catalogue of albums and mixtapes is rife analytic potential, *Tha Carter III* not only shows a Lil Wayne fully aware of commercial expectations and image, but also is the album with the most circulation and the one with which listener's should be most familiar. I purposely did not choose mixtapes, because they are relatively inaccessible and rarely experience the same circulation in the mainstream. Also, there is distinct difference between the rap personas of Mixtape Weezy and Mainstream Weezy. In this study I've purposely focused on Lil Wayne's mainstream rap persona in order to demonstrate the ways his persona is shaped in the most public and commercially mediated spaces. *Rebirth* was chosen because, as its title suggests, this album marked a drastic rebranding of Lil Wayne's popular image. With *Rebirth* he incorporated a rock star aesthetic into his music and costuming. Rap/Rock hybrids are not unfamiliar to hip hop, as seen by Run DMC and the Beastie Boys. Mixing rock's guitar riffs and ganster personae is not as common. This hybrid symbolizes a dangerous space where rock's reckless abandon moves beyond wild, yet mostly harmless, teenage antics into wanton nihilism that threatens established norms of acceptable bodies and borders. Thus, as his foray into performing as a hybrid, integrating racially encoded musical genres *Rebirth* provides a unique study in the intergration of rhetorical forms.

When Malcolm X said in his Ballot or Bullet speech, "…some of you think you came here on the Mayflower," he co-opted the specificity of a proper noun located in a U.S. context to illuminate the reality of black life in the U.S. The proper noun gives us a specific image that has been purported to represent the whole of the nation, and then resituates it in terms of the black experience. The Mayflower, a European symbol of freedom from tyranny is not a symbol of freedom as the colonization of the Americas led to the perpetuation of African enslavement. It no longer signifies what it might for whites once it has been taken through the black experience. We might call this blackwashing, scouring the myth to get to the truth of the matter, (as

whitewashing does the opposite). This has alternately been called this, "revers[ing] the power of dominant culture," both Signifyin(g) and flippin the script.[102] This requires a creative mind that rejects the conventional wisdom to reveal a culturally localized truth. As Smith writes "tropes and schemes of Signifyin(g) are departures from literal meaning…like revolutionism, destroy[ing] conventional definitions to restore wholeness and reality."[103] Carter's linguistic revolution here reveals the shocking reality of Black genius and the potential power of Black prosperity within and through the symbols of Whiteness. Krims sees the same Signifyin in Ice Cube, defining it to be "borrowing, 'inflecting and inverting' signs of the (Eurocentric) culture" to establish a "specific ethnicity."[104] This nature of this interdisciplinary project is to bridge the linguistic and literary and provide a more textured definition and application of the oft-used descriptor, Signifyin. Understanding the establishment of ethnicity via formal textual characteristics is significant as it reinscribes mainstream artists with a historical lineage of meaning-making and invigorates formal analysis as a productive approach to analyzing texts that have been neglected by literary studies.

This section focuses on Carter's use of the aforementioned "signs of the (Eurocentric) culture." Lil Wayne's Signifyin works in at least three ways or, as we see increasingly in *Tha Carter III*, in a combination of these ways: (1) He deconstructs the proper noun as a signifier and uses it as a linguistic bit separate from its context, here the "proper" referent is irrelevant to the understanding of the phrase; (2) In contrast to the former, he also uses the proper noun as a term

---

[102] Samy H. Alim, "Hip Hop Nation Lanugage," *Language in the USA, Themes for the Twenty First Century* eds. Edward Finegan and John R. Rickford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 395.

[103] Arthur Smith, ed., *Language, Communication, and Rhetoric in Black America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 167.

[104] Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95.

that refers to a specific person, place or thing and situates the self in relationship to that referent. This can either be a metaphorical flippin of the term or a reference to his own literal consumption of the proper noun; (3) He scripts a proper noun as embodying another noun (proper or common) because of the initial proper noun's relationship to what has become the embodied phrase; (4) He combines any of the above.

I used musical data from two Lil Wayne CDs, *500 Degreez* (2002) and *Tha Carter III* (2008), coding proper noun references to selfhood as hood-specific, black, and non-black described below. By reference to selfhood I mean instances in the music where Wayne is explicitly articulating his own identity by referring to an object or individual outside of himself. These were defined in the following ways:

- Self (I, Wayne, we, etc.) + am/be/are + proper noun phrase
- Self (I, Wayne, we, etc.) + verb + like + proper noun phrase
- Self (I, Wayne, we, etc.) + verb + proper noun phrase
- Like + proper noun phrase + Self (I, Wayne, we, etc.) + verb
- Call me + proper noun phrase or It's tha + proper noun phrase

I have also included the few instances when Carter defines himself by using a proper noun to refer to what he is not, for example, "I am no Elliot Ness, I don't handcuff, I don't arrest" is counted as using a non-black proper noun reference to selfhood.

I chose proper nouns to focus the scope of the study on the lyrical data that is the most specific. It seems an equally relevant study to analyze common nouns. For example, I'm not arguing that references like "I'm a goon" or "I'm a goblin" are less relevant to an articulation of identity. However, since non-black proper noun references to identity represented a sharp increase between the two albums, I chose to focus on those. More research is necessary to identify the nature of Carter's use of common nouns to refer to himself. This section does not

address the linguistic function of the proper noun versus the common noun. Rather, it assumes more generally that the proper noun is inherently more specific and thus directs the listener more explicitly. The implication is that the artist, in these cases, issues a more controlled discourse. As a result, I have also excluded implicit references to proper nouns (i.e. quoting a singer is considered an implicit reference to the singer). Also, I used references to self that were explicit to analyze the intentional articulation of self. While I do believe that it is an articulation of identification for a rapper to use a specific proper noun in a verse, for example "Sicilian Bitch with long hair" versus "Project Bitch with Hawaiian Silky," identifications that are not explicitly self-referential are not addressed here. So, as much as possible, I relied on the explicit reference to self.

Proper nouns that referred to a black individual or a reference to black culture or black products (explained more fully below) were included in this category. References to personal relationships were not counted here, even if they could also be considered black cultural references. For example, I did not count instances when Carter says that he is the "Birdman J-R" or "Cita in my features" although these are obviously cases of Wayne using a proper noun to articulate his own identity. However, this choice was made to differentiate what we could call intentional references to identity from situational references that relate to his position on a label or his friends and family. Similarly, when he references himself, (Weezy-We, Weezy F, Wayne, etc.) or people working on the song in which the shout out occurs are not included. However, I did count instances when he includes rappers to indicate he is like them in their greatness or that he should be considered in their lineage, Notorious B.IG., Jay Z, and Andre 3000, for example. Urban areas are often racially-coded as are the neighborhoods and streets within those places. These local geographic proper nouns, references to Bourbon Street for example, are excluded from this discussion and discussed separately in chapter four. More general references to the

South in this discussion as Non-Black Specific.

Remaining instances of proper nouns that were not explicitly black or geographic were coded as non-black. This category may have seemed more expansive in a way that did not accurately represent articulation of identity, since includes objects and personalities that may be considered both black and non-black (Ajax and iPhone could arguably fall into this category) or outside the U.S. context, Mercedes, for example. However, for the purposes of this study I coded objects as black only if they have been marketed specifically to a black population, Mizani hair care products, for example. Notably, I have raced all proper noun references to pharmaceutical drugs as non-black and have not considered illicit drug references as proper nouns.[105] Table 1 outlines the data culled from both CDs, demonstrating the variance in references to selfhood.

TABLE 1: References to Selfhood

	Proper Noun References to Black products or personalities (B)	Proper Noun References to non-Black products or personalities (NB)	Proper Noun references to hood, street, gang or location (H)
500 Degreez	**7**	**22**	**8**
Percentage of Total	**19%**	**59%**	**22%**
Tha Carter III	**29**	**76**	**13**
Percentage of Total	**25%**	**64%**	**11%**
Percent Change	**+ 6%**	**+ 5%**	**- 11%**

In this analysis I discuss some of Lil Wayne's uses of the NB proper noun. Out of all the instances of NB popular noun references to self in *500 Degreez,* Lil Wayne situates himself as a

[105] initially wanted to race terms like Si-zurp or purp as Black since their names employ language thought to be coined by Black speech communities. However, the etymology of these terms is primarily based on my own experience, and I could not find sufficient evidence to support it.

consumer of proper nouns about half of the time. These are not counted as Signifyin. While one could argue that conspicuous high-end consumption *is* antithetical to historical constructions of Blackness, he does not use the referents in a way that detaches them from their mainstream symbolism. A Ferrari, for example, is a straight symbol of status and overt rhetorical space is not given to question the lack of access to power and status black men have or the conflicted image of thusly empowered black men in American culture. There is one case that could be considered an exception. He says, "Baby let me get the keys to the **Rover**…No, let me get the keys to the house in **Eastover.**" Thus, he minimizes of the importance of the Land Rover and defines Black wealth in the consumption of high-end clothes and cars, but instead, the house, one that is located in New Orleans specificity. This could be considered a nod towards home ownership, especially considering label-mate and producer Mannie Fresh's punning comments on "Way of Life." As the song ends Mannie Fresh says, "Oh yeah I forgot about **peace. Peace!** I mean, **piece** of pussy, **piece** of land, **piece** of property, just a mind game, piece/peace of mind, **piece/peace** of something." Here, as the song winds down and Mannie Fresh is fading out with the music, he highlights the playfulness of language and the ways that the song's priorities, a *stunna* way of life, shift towards simpler and less ostentatious aspirations. Beginning with pussy, which is throughout the song accumulated as another asset, Mannie Fresh's list importantly pivots on the words "just a mind game" which indicate that the early items in the list are the mind game and that the hustler's real object is just to have peace of mind with a piece of something he can call his own. However, the message of ownership and the possibility of simplicity are drowned out by Lil Wayne's much more frequent Benz, 'Rarri, 'Cedes Jeep, and Bentley references.

In the other cases where Wayne uses these NB popular noun references to self, he adheres to the traditional use of Signifyin to use Eurocentric culture to refer to the his personal experience. In "Look at Me," Wayne is "representin SQ like the **Star Spangled**," a "boy from

the hood, more green than the **Grinch.**" These instances create an identity that recognizes the official, often iconic or nostalgic, meaning of NB references, but uses the knowledge to articulate his identity in relationship to the reference. He represents his block like the Star Spangled Banner represents the nation. This construction indicates that the Star Spangled Banner insufficiently represents the hood. This would accord to the symbolic Signifyin that other southern rappers have done with visual rhetoric of Star Spangled Banner and the confederate flag, representing it in black and silver; black and white; or red, back and green. Also, Lil Wayne uses the Grinch as a symbol of the color green, (since the Grinch is a green character, this was not counted as a full detachment). Then, he flips the standard meaning of green as color to mean one of its black speech meanings, money. Saddik notes how this use operated similarly in earlier mainstream hip hop: "DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince's sampling of a familiar piece of American nostalgia—the 'I Dream of Jeannie' television show theme… is an appropriation of television, a medium that is both enormously popular and which long excluded African Americans. This sampling calls attention to this exclusion."[106] Unlike the sample, which performs a more subtle rhetorical operation, Wayne uses direct reference to paradoxically highlight exclusion and insert himself among America's icons. This is markedly different from Signifyin experts like Malcolm X Amiri Baraka who primarily highlight exclusion from and oppression by mainstream powers.

We also see one notable case of the type of detachment from the "proper" referent and layering combinations or reinscriptions of meaning. In the line, "I can smoke a **Green Mile**" Wayne refers both to the Green Mile as a reference to the walk of prisoners condemned to death as he refers to the film of the same name. But, interestingly, these definitions only serve to lend his line irony as he is literally referring to a pleasurable experience of smoking marijuana. Thus,

---

[106] Annette J. Saddik, "Raps Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity on the American Stage" 122

the tragedy of the referents, whether the film or situation, is undercut by its reinscription in Wayne's lyric. This wry flip redefines the proper as common. In this single case we see extension of what we might tentatively call Signifyin Theory. Where originally, Signifyin works by rescripting Eurocentric culture through questioning and turning the first meaning, now it can be expanded to indicate that the artist first detaches the former meaning, before he flips the script. And yet, this case demonstrates the beginnings of layering multiple meanings within compacted phrases. Since, to smoke, can refer to smoking or killing someone, he can also be saying here that he is metaphorically eradicating the walk of those condemned to state- sanctioned death.

These doubled interpretations speak to each other, while admittedly at the same time stretching the text through the process of analysis and exposing the vulnerabilities of formalist analysis. Hip Hop's realist symbolism intensifies the importance of authorial intent and background in interpretive analysis. However, this stretching need not be considered merely analytic acrobatics. Drug use as the response of the socially condemned subject is not outside of the logic of Lil Wayne's music. Moreover, the acceptance of death as the inevitable sentence to which even wildly successful black men are condemned is prevalent in Wayne's music and hip hop culture. His quip in "Duffle Bag Boy" responding to critics of his drug abuse highlights the logic of drug abuse as what we might call negative agency, "weed and syrup til I die, as a matter of fact it's gone kill me, cause you aint! Ha!" That death is controlled by the subject rather than being externally issued resonates as nihilistic self-hatred to critics for good reason.[107] To destroy the self or others as an act of agency is hardly expansive freedom. However, this narrative speaks to the sustained sociocultural presence of the black male body as a condemned body and the possibility for an

[107] See bell hooks, We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity, Routledge New York, 2004.

alternative response beyond death.[108]

As in the earlier analysis, I only highlight a few of Lil Wayne's uses of the NB proper noun in *Tha Carter III*. However, in this section I proceed in a bit of a backwards fashion than the last. I begin by discussing the instances of creation of self in ways that have been coded as a layering combination (4), since this increased the most significantly from the earlier to the more recent album. These cases also seem to represent the most inventive and ambivalent uses of language.

In the song "La, La" Wayne seems at first to be using the technique coded as (1) to play and pun on the language detaching the NB proper noun phrase from its meaning, saying "Fuck me, I'm all about **we/oui** like **Paris Hilton.**" Here the initial literal interpretation is elusive. It's a pun, but one that creates a creative logic pointing the listeners away from the NB referent and to the word itself. The simile is not comparative in the traditional sense, even if we account for the homophones, we and oui. He is not indicating that Paris Hilton is French nor that she is all about her community (all about *we* rather than *me*). Paris Hilton, the person, becomes irrelevant. Instead her first name becomes the embodiment of the French, as Paris, the city, and "oui," meaning yes, are symbolic markers of Frenchness. Shortly, Wayne is to *we* what Paris is to *oui*. Where else do you get a homophone called out from another language and Signifyin on a socialite with language so slippery it shouldn't make sense?

However, this is what he *seems* at first to be doing. The elegant economy of Signifyin and trading in the power of the pun is that you can get three meanings out of one word. Wayne might have almost slipped one more meaning by us. This we/oui could also be heard as "We," as in Lil Wayne, Weezy-**We**, Stunta Junior. That is, "fuck me [the individual offstage comes second to the

---

[108] See Ellis and Agamben.

rapping persona] I'm all about **We** like Paris Hilton" (the superstar *is* the brand name which is separate from the real, perhaps conflicted self). Adapting this possible interpretation, Weezy- We might be saying, *Fuck Dwayne Carter, for now, I'm all about enlarging the scope of my brand, We, like Paris Hilton.* Additionally, this "we" can refer to the collective or royal we of family and empire without pulling away from the meaning of Paris Hilton as a cultural symbol. Using "we" here as the collective, the phrase becomes one in which Carter is concerned with building the Young Money label and its artists the way that Hilton is able to leverage her individual status to legitimate related ventures.

In another instance of doubling that occurs on the song immediately following, (perhaps a nod to the three seasons of *Simple Life* when the Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie were seen as a pair), Wayne skims over the self-referential sentence, "I'm richer than Nicole, and I'm a lion like her daddy," as smoothly as he might have been saying his own name. In the first half of the phrase, we can infer by the later contextualization that he is indeed speaking about Nicole Richie. We might interpret this as a self-aggrandizing, (he told us he was "gainin weight"), literal estimation of him as simply having more money than the real person Nicole Richie. She certainly is one of the intensely famous socialites that audiences assume have plenty of cash.

However, we also hear the silent echo (Richie isn't stated of course) of "Richie" and "richer." Thus, the NB proper noun phrase becomes significant in its absence. The reference of the word "Richie" is significant, as a word, without its proper referent, the person, Nicole Richie. The subtext of the line could easily be heard to say *I'm richer than someone called, "**Rich**-ie," like the cartoon rich child, Richie Rich,* similar to a pun like blacker than Joe Black. Further, he extends the doubling in the end of the line, "I'm a lion like her daddy." Here, he uses the same techniques of signaling to a word that is not stated and detaching the proper noun from its referent: *I'm as much of a beast as someone called "**Lion**-el."* Similar to the first half, Wayne can't mean just one

thing. So, the comparison can function to mean literally, I'm more significant than the musical heavy, Lionel Richie.

Other uses, coded as (1), are more easily recognizable as him cracking open a word for a pun that is not attached to its proper referent. When he says, "I'm all about the **rucku**s like **fud**," he is not saying that Fuddruckers is a restaurant that embodies ruckus somehow, but rather is a word that contains ruckus in it, (if you know how to say it right). So, being the chef he is, Carter chops up the Eurocentric marker of the all-American, the burger joint, and makes it an aside. Similarly, the phrase "I'm a **leave it to** God, not **Beava**, neitha you" takes a white U.S. referent, Beaver Cleaver, detaches it from its original content and uses it self-referentially. We don't have to know anything about the show, *Leave it to Beaver*, to get the wordplay. In fact, knowing the context interferes with the pun. In the television show, the phrase "leave it to Beaver" is used colloquially, meaning, "leave it to Beaver to get tangled in boyish shenanigans" not "give this important responsibility to Beaver."

When Wayne uses a NB proper noun phrase as attached to its referent (2), in *Tha Carter III* there is a significant decrease in its presence as a commodity. Further, on "A Milli," one of these references is used in ways that could be considered flipping the consumption into a resistant position by foregrounding his position as a formerly poor black man who can cop cars that black men from Hollygrove aren't supposed to have; "I open the **Lamborghini**, Hopin them crackas see me, like look at that bastard Weezy." However, this isn't the same sort of flipping the reference as a line like "I can work you out like **Bowflex.**" He still situates himself as a consumer identified, by ownership, to a NB proper referent. Still, the shift away from relating self to the brand name commodity represents the most statistically significant shift from the earlier album, a decrease of 42 percent. Unlike the instances of simple consumption on the *500* Degrees, these uses demonstrate an awareness of the racial character of unequal capitalistic accumulation.

The way Lil Wayne uses of NB proper nouns as attached to their referents in a metaphorical flip (2), upsetting their established uses, was discussed in the *500 Degreez* section, so I will not discuss them at length here. The rest of the analysis will cover the other innovation that only appears once in *500 Degreez*. *Tha Carter III* contains a small body of references that float somewhere between being attached and detached from their referent. These might also be considered puns, but they operate differently than the others on the album. I will discuss two of them here.

In the first song on *Tha Carter III*, "3 Peat," Lil Wayne says, "I can do this shit for my click like **Adam Sanla**." This is not the same sort of pun that he uses elsewhere on the album. The meaning of the simile isn't tied to the other possible meanings of "Adam" or "Sandler." Additionally, the meaning is not tied directly to the person, Adam Sandler, (as in the case, "bitches tryna kick it like **Jun Tao**" or "I'm rare, like **Mr. Clean** with hair") Here the meaning is reassembled by the listener associating Adam Sandler as the embodiment of *Click*, a film he starred in. Thus "click" exists as "C/click" by the time we have reached the end of the line. This playful redirection is only heightened by the next line, "I control Hip Hop, and I'ma keep it on my channel." "I Control Hip Hop," like Adam Sandler controls his life with a magical universal remote in the film, "Click," or like a "clicker" controls a television set. Economy.

Another instance of this sort of attaching, but not attaching to the NB proper noun referent is in "A Milli": "Even **Gwen Stefani** said she couldn't doubt me." This could be heard as Lil Wayne indicating that he has pull with the ladies. This definition requires that the listener code Gwen Stefani as being a particularly difficult lady for Wayne to get, perhaps because they wouldn't be thought to be in the same circles, (white Ska/pop singer from Cali with Wayne? Didn't I just see her on Dawson's Creek? That's a pimp move!) Stranger things have certainly happened. But, this reference might be operating in the same way that the Adam Sandler reference is operating. Gwen Stefani is not the true object of the pun, rather, No Doubt, her band,

is.

This chapter illustrates the value of creating room within the scholarship to investigate hip hop music as a text rather that assuming that the art form is necessarily representational of mainstream expectations and values in direct correlation. This evaluation of hip hop as representing, replicating, and indeed augmenting the worst of American mainstream values is often visible in gender analyses of hip hop. Speaking of artists who do not in fact lead violent lives or practice violence, hooks says that the images of hip hop masculinity "collude with violent patriarchal culture by assuming this [gangsta] persona and perpetuating the negative racist/sexist stereotypes."[109] Commentary like this is so prevalent in hip hop scholarship that evaluators of hip hop no longer need to support claims of "hypermasculine" misogyny with evidence or define what is meant by these terms in the context of black or mainstream culture. In addition to understanding the music as part of a much larger ecosystem of cultural memory, values, and experience, the telling moments of resistance and slippage are vital to instrumentalizing mainstream music, especially when that music is created by those with provisional access. The slippages highlighted in this chapter illustrate Lil Wayne's increasing use of the rhetorical tropes and schemes of Black Speech practice even as he garnered increasing popularity and mainstream acceptance. The next chapter follows this consideration of the possibility of slippage and resistance woven into black popular music, demonstrating how Lil Wayne and hip hop's mainstream superstars operate together to create an unstable version of gender that rejects more acceptable, and as I argue, more damaging performances of black gender.

---

[109] bell hooks, *We Real Cool*, 56.

Chapter 3 More than a Man: Gendered Liberation and Resistance

The investigation of mainstream images of black masculinity must address the ways that the feminine is gendered simultaneously and often in relationship with black manhood. Even as post-structural feminists grapple with the undoing of the most fundamental categories of being, cultural theorists often isolate men and women in their studies, finding it difficult to describe bodies as performing fluid gender. More than that, in the case of representations of black masculinity, black men are analyzed as bodies in isolation *and* crisis. As described in chapter one, hip hop scholars in particular often address black masculinity in the music as being "hijacked," "co-opted," or "inauthentic" performances of "hyper masculine" black manhood. Thus, rather than analyses that investigate gender representation, scholars are predisposed to categorize rappers as being either reformulating brute stereotypes or contributing to "positive" masculine identity. This either/or dichotomy wherein masculinity is defined as either progressive or regressive often hinders us from evaluating the multilayered and ambivalent ways that gender is enacted by males and females.

Rappers are additionally seen as responsible for scripting negative images of black women. It cannot be understated that hip hop presents women as fundamentally sexual bodies. His sparse referenced to his daughter and mother notwithstanding, Wayne is especially vocal about the disposable sexuality of women. However, I argue the indictment of hip hop as fundamentally misogynist is a misuse of terminology that does a disservice to women's activist practice as it isolates black men as anti-women and women-hating, echoing historic pop culture images of black men as rapist brutes. It bears repeating that I am not saying here that hip hop artists including Lil Wayne present real world images of women or that representation doesn't matter. I argue, rather, that Lil Wayne's holistic representation of gender should be the focus of

analysis. This argument is founded in the evaluation of gender as relational and performative rather than individual and prescriptive. As Gaunt instructs, "rather than limiting our conversation to misogyny, the subordination of women to men, or to the discrimination against black men and black fathers, hip hop and musical blackness will greatly benefit from embedding discussions about masculinity and femininity into a larger framework about gender as well as race."[110]1 This chapter addresses gender as a holistic process and sum of actions by and on a body in mainstream music production and consumption. Here I aim to rethink the ways that black bodies in the mainstream are evaluated, particularly the ways they are thought of as feminine/masculine, natural/unnatural, and positive/negative. In doing this, I also highlight the ways that boundaries of man, woman, black, and white are policed by public censure and individual performance. This chapter returns to Lil Wayne's performance investigating what exactly is meant by "hyper masculinity" in relationship to blackness in hip hop culture and the ways that listeners, scholars, and journalists cooperate to police gender and neutralize moments of gender ambiguity and potential popular expressions of subversion or resistance. This chapter uses the work of gender, literature, and performance studies scholars to broaden the expected fields brought to bear on hip hop.

In choosing Lil Wayne's image-making, I'm most interested in the (im)possibility of diverse and meaningful expressions of raced and gendered subjectivity (we could also think of this in terms of Adorno's spontaneous play and genuine subjectivity or individuality or Butler's subversive parody) in a culture obsessed with conceptualizing gender as expressed most fully through the ideal, modified body, a modified body that must feign authentic naturalness. My

---

[110] Kyra Gaunt, "One Time 4 Your Mind," in *Born to Use Mics*, edited by Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daulatzai, (Basic Civitas Books: New York, 2010) 175.

contention is that Carter represents a transitional body that must be publicly disciplined for crossing into the shadow lands of a purportedly race- and gender-neutral U.S. In a cultural moment where fragmentation and plurality dominate conversation of race and gender, his gender performance demonstrates a negotiation of, and perhaps more often than not their acquiescence to, public unease with leaky borders and terms of acceptance that are still restricted by traditional scripts of race and gender. Understanding that even the most ostensibly unambiguous and iconic bodies must continually negotiate and perform within recognizable and historically-located bodies allows us to recognize the performance of race and gender as fraught with the anxiety of being found inauthentic. Interrogating authenticity, while a mainstay of black cultural studies at least as far back as the Harlem Renaissance, is equally important in conceptions of black gender. The authentic body is one that performs acceptable gendered and racial identities.

In the lineage of Butler and Fanon, Aimé Ellis identifies Bigger Thomas' "playing white" mimicry of white elites as bearing within it the possibility of questioning, opposition, and subversion.[111] Similarly, males playing "men" or "hyper masculinity" access the potential to both subvert and reaffirm. This ambivalent potential of parody has long been recognized by cultural theorists, Adorno, Butler, Baktin, Jameson, and Gates, for example. As Butler writes "Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain types of parodist repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and rearticulated as instruments of cultural hegemony."[112] Admittedly, potentially gender-bending expressions (male as cartoon man) can be folded back into fabric that suffocates bodies and limits their potential for various expressions of gender and ultimately of a unique self-

---

[111] Aimé Ellis, *If We Must Die: From Bigger Thomas to Biggie Smalls* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 2011), 31

[112] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 176-177.

identity and ultimately freedom. Violating the laws of race and gender are only permissible by those who simultaneously express exaggerated performance, performing as monsters and spectacles, as in the case of Lil Wayne and label-mate Nicki Minaj. "Just as body surfaces are enacted *as* the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performance status of the natural itself."[113] Wayne's use of parody emphasizes the difference from the purported genuine article, and questions the reality of genuineness itself. Why see Lil Wayne and as a potential outsider playing with parody and spectacle to create a more liberal and resistant gender oppression? Beyond the fact that, as shown in chapter two, hip hop's use of black rhetorics makes it a space for resistant play and revision of oppressive symbolism, Lil Wayne creates images of self that rely on spectacle, continually calling attention to the fabricated and parodist nature of his performance of self and use traditionally inappropriate race and gender rhetoric.

Lil Wayne's body armor of tattoos is little different than the male ego in which Nicki Minaj performs. This alter ego, Roman Polanski, who she says comes out when she is mad, allows her to perform lyrical masculinity, while at the same time embodying pin-up doll femininity. Both artists perform a masculine pose associated with aggression and power. If drag can create a reality, performers drag (verb) to destabilize not cultural norms of nature, but to destabilize their own mediocrity and powerlessness within the race and gender matrix. Since this is an unpredictable and often reactive process, destabilization doesn't have to happen in this case, as Butler asserts "Gender can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at. Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-

---

[113] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 186

normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact."[114]

As Levy demonstrates, it is not just black women who are increasingly playing the role of the Female Chauvinist Pig (FCP). In fact, her lack of focus on race in the construction of the FCP may indicate the ways that for black women, this role has been normalized. Also, it is worth noting the existence of a third category of gender that is particularly relevant to the study of hip hop gender and "hyper masculinity." As much as men have been described as "hyper masculine," hip hop's female icons have been under the same pressure to perform "hyper masculine" lyricism and hyper feminine bodies. This combination of Levy's "cartoon man" and "cartoon woman" is described by Jackson and Camara as "Thug Misses." However, while Jackson and Camara describe "Thug Misses" as "modern hybrids of the Sapphire, Jezebel, and Brute," they do not ascribe gender to these attributes as is done with men in hip hop. Thus,when Lil Wayne is violent, he is exhibiting hyper masculine pathologies, but when Lil Kim is violent, she is just violent. This is not merely an "inversion of a codified patriarchy"[115] where females act as violent women to assert power. It is a performance of a codified patriarchy where females act as violent *men* to assert power. Nicki Minaj's persona, Roman Polanski exemplifies this. This is a fundamental difference that exposes the tendency of rhetoric (from scholars and rappers) that cannot deal outside of normalized dichotomies. Each of Minaj's personas ironically isolate and seal genders off from each other, while Wayne's gender flexibility occurs within the same masculine persona.

This section investigates the ways that Lil Wayne and other Cash Money artists articulate this ostensible "gender ambiguity" of which Butler speaks, but use this same ambiguity unlike

---

[114] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* xiv

[115] Jackson and Camara, "Scripting and Consuming Black Bodies," 189.

Beyoncé and Ariel's *female chauvinist pigs*, here they seem to destabilize rather than reaffirm racial and gender norms. Of course this norming practice doesn't just happen within the body, but subjects are gendered from outside as they are raced from outside. Thus, this section also highlights the ways that hip hop artists' gender ambiguity is regulated by music reporters and scholars when their bodies stray too far afield from normative prescriptions.

When Rick Ross boasts "we know you pussy, so you got my niggas masturbatin," (Rick Ross," So Sophisticated," *God Forgives, I Don't*) he expresses a moment where the narrative of aggressive hyper-hetero-masculinity exposes its own vulnerabilities. Although at first it doesn't seem any challenge to the architecture of masculinity norms. By calling his adversaries pussy, Ross is presenting no new slur or novel, slippery gender-bending revision of language. Rappers, and many others for that matter, have been using "bitch," "pussy," and "soft" to effeminize their enemies, to strip them of their gender, unmask them as women. However, Ross' line goes at least two steps farther. Ross indicates that these adversaries are so feminine, they prompt sexual arousal, and Ross is creating an imaginary space where men are aroused by other men, although this arousal stems primarily and paradoxically from hatred and the drive to overpower violently. The conflation of violence with sexual acts is a commonplace illustration of hyper masculinity found in much of hip hop music. For example "masterbating" and "finger fucking" are used by Lil Wayne and Tupac respectively to indicate pulling a gun's trigger. This conflation either feminizes the object, as in the case with Tupac, or makes the couples the gun and penis, as in the case with Wayne. In Ross' case the men not only become the feminized object, they become the feminized object of desire. Additionally, this imaginary is communal in nature. Ross describes a group of men masturbating, a homosocial scene in which manhood is conferred on those in his group from sexual dominance of other men. These two factors disrupt the hetero normative "hyper masculine" narrative if we are to read "hyper masculinity" as defined to be an extreme

performance of mainstream masculinity. This is not merely an extreme performance, it is another more nuanced thing altogether. By using what I would call the feminizing metaphor the speaker is positioned in a momentarily indeterminate gender, a space made all the more indeterminate and potentially subversive because of its juxtaposition against mainstream tropes of masculinity.

These momentary subversions are also woven into black cultural performances of masculinity in literature. For example, Ellis sees this same ambiguity present in *Native Son*. "The persistent interplay of black male homosociality implicit in Bigger's relationship with Gus…from the warm, intimate exchange 'on the block' to the violent rituals that build 'reputation' and mask fear in the neighborhood poolroom to the homoerotically suggestive masturbation in the theater."[116] Excising non-normative definitions of manhood and reading black masculinity as "hyper" or overdone brutish versions of whiteness prevents readers and listeners from being able to see these performances of masculinity part of a normal human spectrum. In the case of Bigger Thomas, Ellis contends that the suggestive scenes of intimate and warm homosocial behavior are part of a totality of Bigger that are not aberrations to his character, but rather intricately linked to the expressions of rage and hatred. Both qualities demonstrate reasonable human responses to the crushing weight of soul-killing oppression. Similarly, Ross' momentary lapse into gender ambiguity must be layered and surrounded by extreme hetromasculine violent and sexual action.

This erasure of the feminine and lack of specificity in defining the term "hyper masculine" is reiterated by well-meaning hip hop scholars as well. Speaking of beauty culture and the video vixen "It is a new black gender politics completely in the service of jack-legged black masculinity. And that masculinity has been cobbled together from the stultifying remains

---

[116] Ellis, 27.

of white supremacy, media, and the undeserved privileges accrued globally by American manhood"[117] As noted in chapter one's discussion of hip hop scholarship as a sociological intervention against black males in crisis, scholars see popular hip hop masculinities as representing increasingly narrow hyper masculine roles. Even sympathetic critics worry that without informed consumption "hip-hop will become just another form of social control, a leveling mechanism that operates to reduce diversity and bring standouts in line with dominant stereotypes."[118] Ironically, this reduction of diversity and censure of outliers is the very cultural work being done, without significant critical comment, in Beyoncé's performance and reception. It is the rare case to see a scholar up in arms about the crisis of black femininity evinced by Beyoncé's image. This double standard is perhaps due to the fact that black women in popular culture are often theorized as having a "perverse sort of agency" that is ultimately deferent to male authority while black men in hip hop are often theorized as being authentic agents.[119] Hip hop artistry being described as "hyper masculine" is such well-travelled discourse the word has become synonymous with hip hop studies and rarely do discussions of hip hop occur for very long without the language of overdone excessive manhood or the word "hyper masculinity" itself. The question remains, what is to be done with the moments of dissonance and rupture in the image of "hyper masculinity"? Not only do we lose these moments of dissonance by misreading black masculinity as merely an extreme version of white masculinity, we also lose the function of the grotesque and the extreme as a stylistic device to reveal and question the nature of masculine norms.

I demonstrate the function of these two related functions of the feminized metaphor by

---

[117] Sharpley-Whiting, 51.
[118] Kyra Gaunt, "One Time 4 Your Mind," 153
[119] Sharpley-Whiting, 109

retuning to Lil Wayne's use of it in some of his most recent work. It's important to note that he did not use feminized metaphors in his early rap. This indicates that his music has shifted in part to reflect the desire of many black male musicians and artists to inhabit more expansive definitions of race and gender. While Lil Wayne still raps with an undeniable penchant for violence, sex, and money, his recent albums demonstrate distinct shifts in imagemaking.

"It's Good," the last track on Lil Wayne's tenth studio album, *Tha Carter IV*, was perceived as controversial, because several reporters surmised that Lil Wayne was taking shots at Jay-Z by responding to an earlier dis from Jay in "H*A*M."[120] Like much of the album, music critics found Lil Wayne's verse on the track lackluster. There seemed to be little to say about what they deemed a somewhat predictable, albeit entertaining, verse. In this instance Wayne demonstrated a typical feminization of his haters, "Stop playin, I aint wit that bullshit. Niggas act like bitches, Shenehneh, 'Oh my goodness." Here, he makes reference to Shenehneh Jenkins, a character on the 1990's black sitcom *Martin*. In the television show, lead actor Martin Lawrence cross-dresses as the rude and uncouth neighbor, Shenehneh. Shenehneh is always causing troublefor the main characters, so naturally this comparison works. Lil Wayne uses his characteristic technique of using proper nouns, signal words, and related phrases to refer back to and add texture to a common noun.[121] Here, by alluding to Shenehneh, using one of her catch phrases, and slightly shifting his delivery of the word "goodness" to imitate Lawrence's delivery, Wayne adds a layer of comic specificity to the otherwise straightforward emasculating dis. If that was the only type of emasculating dis that Wayne employs it could fit into hip hop's supposed

---

[120] http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/turnitup/chi-lil-wayne-album-review-tha-carter-iv-reviewed- 20110829,0,2750188.column; http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1679051/jay-z-kanye-west-lil-wayne-diss.jhtml;

[121] For example, "You niggas pussy, Hello Kitty" "It's Good" *Tha Carter IV*; "Life's a crazy bitch, Grace Jones," "Intro" *Tha Carter IV*.

construction of hyper masculinity.[122]

However, Wayne performs a rhetoric of flexible and fluid masculinity in several key ways. Like the aforementioned example from Rick Ross, one of the ways that Lil Wayne destabilizes masculinity is not just by feminizing his target, but by additionally making the target of his attack a metaphorical object of sexual desire. For example, on "Bitches and Bottles" he raps, "All them niggas hatin, fuck you in ya pussy."[123] Thus, instead of what would be more common parlance, calling adversaries "pussy" or saying "fuck you," Wayne creates a momentary space of gender flexibility and calls attention to the ironic practice of rhetorical feminization. Though "pussy" obviously stands as a marker for female, like "fuck you," is not necessarily sexual, and used in hip hop more often as an asexual denigration. With this additional intensification, men don't just metaphorically have a female (weak) character, they have female bodies, subject to objectification and penetration. The logic of Wayne's emasculation, given the rigid gender dichotomy in mainstream culture, makes men who fail as men potential objects of desire. This flexibility is all the more potentially subversive in light of his proclamation "I'm the pussy monster, and you gotta feed me pussy."[124]

This calls heterosexual norms of masculinity into question in what could be seen as an extension of the "no homo" phenomenon that widens rather than narrows the possibility of black masculine expression. Rapping during what Weiner described as the "*no homo* vogue" Wayne

---

[122] However, it's important to note that while Wayne often calls his adversaries pussies and bitches he rarely indicates specifically what behaviors reduce men to women. It is an important distinction in that these lyrics don't actually do the work of narrowing the options for acceptable male behavior even though they allow Wayne to maintain credibility as an authentic man. So, his persona becomes credible even though his performance of black often fails mainstream expectations, i.e. his kissing men on the lips, calling another grown man "Daddy."

[123] Bitches and Bottles (Let's Get It Started) DJ Khaled feat. TI, Lil Wayne, Future, and Hit-Boy

[124] "Pussy Monster"

was one of several rappers to pepper several rhymes with references that could have been considered vaguely homosexual. These lines were of course promptly followed by the phrase "no homo" to ostensibly clear up any confusion. For example, "I get money out the ass, no homo, but I'm rich", "You, Niggas suck like Tony Romo, no homo," and "he so sweet, make you wanna lick tha w/rapper." Weiner's comment about the no homo phenomenon applies to Wayne's aforementioned use of "pussy" and "fuck you." "When these rappers say "no homo," it can seem a bit like a gentleman's agreement, nodding to the status quo while smuggling in a fuller, less hamstrung notion of masculinity. This is still a concession to homophobia, but one that enables a less rigid definition of the hip-hop self than we've seen before." As Weiner notes, Wayne ironically expresses more flexible masculinity, even one that would otherwise be characterized as homosexual behavior without his own masculinity being called into question.[125]

This flexibility and destabilization of masculine norms is further enacted when Wayne's inhabits the space of a female or feminized persona. While the earlier reference to adversaries having a "pussy" can be read entirely within a misogynist framework, when Wayne's own rap persona is feminized or takes on female attribute or female body parts, the misogynist reading falters. At the first level Wayne metaphorically compares himself to women using metaphors. For example, he raps "I break a bitch down like Tonya Harding," indicating that he is as tough as the infamous ice skater, a comparison that could make him seem weak considering the possible comparisons. He uses the same sort of trope in in the line "I keep some bud like Rudy Huxtable," comparing his penchant for marijuana to the TV friendship of the young Huxtable and her

---

[125] Weezy's Ambitionz" *Dedication II* 2006 Mixtape; "Back on My Grizzy" *Da Drought III 2007 Mixtape*; "Mrs. Officer" *Tha Carter III*; "Jonah Weiner, Does This Purple Mink Make Me Look Gay? The rise of no homo and the changing face of hip- hop homophobia. Slate.com Posted Thursday, Aug. 6, 2009 http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/music_ box/2009/08/does_this_purple_mink_make_me_look_gay.2.html

playmate. However, he goes further in other instances. As Wayne raps, "I'm going in like my water broke," "If you are what you eat, I'm so pussy," and "My pockets so fat, I'm startin to feel contractions." Compare this metaphor to one similarly articulated by Atlanta- based rapper 2Chainz "My pockets look pregnant, they bout to deliver." In the latter example 2Chainz uses the metaphor in the more traditional way, by distancing himself from a metaphor that would put him in the rhetorical space of a woman. In contrast Wayne completes the intensification of this gender flexibility by entirely inhabiting the space of femininity. [126]

Importantly in these cases he does not include the without the safe qualifier "no homo" or the conditional "if I were," like Beyoncé does in "If I Were a Boy." He simply speaks as a female persona. Horton-Stallings' discussion about the removal of "taboo" speech in black oral culture is instructive here. She writes, "removing such restraints acts as one goal of the trickster figure and the African-American oral tradition, to deliver and re-empower through the interaction of language and sexuality. The main purpose of the evolved African-American oral tradition works to move away from constriction, objectification, and dehumanization. Ambiguity and ironic use of language and the body provide liberating experiences."[127] This is the very potential of liberation that Lil Wayne accesses with his moments of shape-shifting gender flexibility. These acts could be seen as merely part of the creative choices that Lil Wayne is making, harmless metaphors swirled into a slurry of lyrics that often seem to have the stream of consciousness character and preponderance of puns seen in freestyle. However, the potential for these lyrics to be read as feminized is a distinct liability in a culture obsessed with scripting

---

[126] "Put Some Keys on That" Da Drought III 2007 Mixtape; "Intro" *Tha Carter IV*; "Intro" *Tha Carter IV*; "Ice" Kelly Rowland feat. Lil Wayne; "Karate Chop (Remix)" Future, feat. Lil Wayne

[127] Stallings, L. H. "Going Trickster: Using the African-American Oral Tradition to Rid America of Traditional Language Taboos." *Black Renaissance* 3, no. 2 (Apr 30, 2001): 14-14.

hip hop masculinity as hyperhetero.

Investigating this either using the typical construct of "hyper masculinity" or hyper capitalist, reveals little answers about the significance of this lyrical cross-dressing. One might argue that this is a purposeful variation targeted at a female audience. Perhaps Wayne is trying to relate more to women and increase his market penetration. This argument could very well be supported by the increase in tracks overtly concerning relationships. For example, "How to Love" and "How to Hate" from *Tha Carter IV* that reveal Wayne's rap persona as having a broken heart wanting to be in a loving relationship. However, that does not explain why he doesn't use these metaphors on these songs ostensibly targeted towards women. This explanation also doesn't show why his overall posture towards women and sexuality remains largely unchanged. Even though he sends rare shout outs to his mother and daughter that majority of females and male adversaries are described as bitches, hoes, and pussy. Instead it seems that like the "no homo" phenomenon, the shift in gender identification provides new approaches to the rhetoric of masculinity even as Wayne simultaneously performs as aggressive displays of mainstream masculinity. As McClary and Walser recognized nearly two decades ago, investigating the complexities of black popular music's performance of sexuality is central to the future of black music scholarship, "to discuss the erotic or bodily aspects of cultural texts or performances is not to reduce them; for, as in cultural criticism more generally, we need to produce accounts of historical and social interaction that are rich and nuanced enough to support detailed critical readings." Rather than recognizing the nuance and multiple resonances within these lyrical displays, they are suppressed by critics who, rather than seeing him as purposefully performing a novel persona, consistently code his persona and behavior as criminal, animalistic,

or crazy.[128]

As much as music critics recognize the talent and cultural capital Lil Wayne has there are still significant ways that his image and performance must be framed in order to function within the prefabricated image of hip hop's black masculinity. As the previous section demonstrated, there are significant ways that Lil Wayne's performance pulls away from the characteristic hyper masculine performance. How then could he continue to be a viable commodity in pop culture and incorporate such potentially subversive behavior? In addition to Wayne's own ambivalence, which is often boisterously complicit with mainstream expectations of violent, drug and gang affiliated youth, critical reception of his persona and work preserves the image of brutish masculinity by downplaying the non-conformist elements. Several trends emerge in music journalism about Lil Wayne. First, descriptions of his behavior intensify their strangeness or criminality. Additionally, although his work is characteristically described as "genius," the genius of his work is described as inscrutable, accidental, or deranged. Above all, these descriptions often incorporate descriptors of Dwayne Carter, Jr., the individual, that make no separation between himself and the Lil Wayne, the rap persona, for example calling him a gangsta rather than an gangsta rapper. His behavior, costuming, body, and vocal delivery are perceived as authentic. Like Beyoncé's image of the natural woman, Wayne's image is only seen as inauthentic when his actions are outside of mainstream expectations of black masculinity.

In journalistic descriptions and interviews Lil Wayne seems to have sprouted from a

---

[128] Wayne's lyrics, however often describe wanting to please women sexually. This defies, yet again, a simplified notion of the "hyper masculine" image of rappers only intent on using women for their own pleasure. This is not to say that Wayne doesn't do the same. Yet, there is a consistent description of male sexual prowess as being at least partly defined through a man's eager performance of oral sex on women. This quality is uncharacteristic among rap artists; McClary, Susan and Robert Walser. "Theorizing the Body in African-American Music." Black Music Research Journal 14, no. 1 (1994): 75-84.

crack in the pavement, running willy-nilly with no thought to the performance of his body or performance at all. He is described as a kiddie gangsta and wild child from New Orleans who dealt crack. The humanizing backstory, carefully parsed in rap music, is a real liability for writers and readers intent on imagining a mad genius with a "strange mind and brilliant rhymes." The rhetoric and the image surrounding music journalism reflect a position towards the black masculine that see black exceptionalism as a dangerous and unnatural oddity. In an article published by *LA Weekly*, Wayne is depicted in a cartoon caricature with one fist balled menacingly at his side and another balled around his crotch. His body is drawn with an apelike lengthened top half bared and tatted showcasing an enlarged neck that is practically the width of his abdomen, (we could merely attribute this to Webster's artistic style of representation, except that no other caricature, including the characters of his graphic novel, are represented in this manner). This picture is included with an article that begins, "for a music born and bred in the streets, hip-hop is no stranger to the courtroom" indicating several conflations in media representation: (1) poverty and crime (2) and "street" crime with copyright infringement. If the same article was concerned with plagiarism, for example, it would not begin as such. This indicates that writers and their reading public consider plagiarism much less "street" read unrefined, than hip hop's struggle with copyright laws. While the article, rightly asserts that it is not the act but the change in public and legal definitions of infringement that brought the case to trial, "four years ago, "I feel like dying" wouldn't have attracted a lawsuit," (par 4, retrieved 4/16/09). It frames this concession in language that collapses allegation and guilt AND rap music and illegal sampling putting Wayne's legal use (at least historically legal) of the sample in question. This is just one of the over 200 songs he distributed for promotion on the internet in 2007, many of which used copyrighted samples and beats.

Wayne's legal issues are imagined as being peculiar and arising from hip hop's legacy of

extra-legal activity. Not only does this speak to the historical legacy of black masculinity as being strange and needing to be publically restricted, it also mirrors the way his behavior and body is described in other music articles. The music industry's top superstars are notorious for drug use and abuse; however, rather than seeing Lil Wayne's getting high as blissful escape or a routinized form of behavior that is not particularly sensational, as he articulates the experience in his music, or as treatment for the severe migraines that he's had since childhood, or seeing the image of his drug use as central to the outlaw logic of the Lil Wayne brand, writers describe his drug use as prompting the "random" even if genius musical creation. Binelli describes his profile on Lil Wayne as a look "Inside the hermetically sealed, perpetually stoned, compulsively improvised bubble around the world's most endearing gangsta." Binelli isn't alone in characterizing Wayne as a crazed and stoned genius stumbling haphazardly upon his performances. Wayne is described as having "scattered-brain brilliance" and "mad genius lyrics." Sheffield writes "It's thrilling how unhinged Weezy sounds on Tha Carter Ill's proper followup." Writers hasten to qualify Wayne's genius as being "of the mad sort," calling him, as Greenblatt does, a "lyrical genius/bona fide kook." This is in direct contrast to how Wayne describes the secret to his success, "I work very hard…I love to work. We don't approach things like we are good. We just approach things like we're gonna work and we're gonna work hard. And hard work pays off. If you work that hard you're gonna get good and good turns to great."[129]

---

[129] In his interview with Katie Couric and in other interviews, Wayne has indicated that his use of marijuana is medicinal. In Couric's interview, he says, "I have migraines that make me want to kill myself;" Wayne's ambiguous phrase, "light it up, that's smoke and mirrors" on "Mirror" from *Tha Carter IV* is additional evidence that smoking weed is an acknowledged aspect of his public image, regardless of the reality it may or may not accurately reflect. This is a strategy of "understanding" black musical genius that writers have used in their analyses of many black male performers, Miles Davis and Jimi Hendrix are two ready examples. Unnatural

This journalistic desire to augment the strangeness of Wayne's behavior is compounded by descriptions of his voice as animalistic. For example, Dolan writes "Reception in jail must really suck because the connection is so hazy it renders his commanding bullfrog croak into something thin and frayed." This depiction precludes any thought of Wayne's vocal shift issuing from the emotional and physical impact of incarceration. This description also, like other writers, doesn't acknowledge the possibility that Wayne's voice is part of his rap persona—that even in interviews artists are keenly aware of themselves as performing. Binelli for example writes, "His speaking voice has the same lizardy croak as his rapping voice," virtually ignoring himself as a consumer of Wayne the performer. This ignores the significance of pitch, timbre and delivery in rap music. Like his tattoos, rock star swag, and lyricism, his voice is compared to an animal or described in terms of illness. Take Norris who writes, "His voice is a deep croak; he sounds like he's been up for weeks," or Binelli's "with a hoarse delivery that sounds as if he's spent the past six months freebasing Vicks VapoRub." Not only does Binelli incorporate the image and language of illness by using the words "hoarse" and "Vicks VapoRub," he alludes to freebasing, increasing the likelihood that readers will associate Wayne with increasingly intense drug abuse. The persistence of journalistic framing of Wayne's behavior as authentic, animalistic and criminal quashes the potential of performance to destabilize social norms. Evaluating his rap persona in a way that accounts for the act of performance and recognizes the playfulness in Wayne's lyricism allows for listeners to imagine alternatives to mainstream values.[130]

---

behavior seems to be the only way for black men to access genius; Tatangelo, Wade. "Lucinda, Lil Wayne and More." *Creative Loafing*,2008; Tatangelo, Wade. "Best Songs of 2008." *Creative Loafing*,2008. Sheffield, Rob. "Lil Wayne Finally Goes all in." *Rolling Stone* no. 1139 (Sep 15, 2011): 72-72. CARAMANICA, JON and Simon Vozick-Levinson. "Wax & Wayne." *Entertainment Weekly* no. 998 (Jun 20, 2008) Greenblatt, Leah. "Grammy Predictions 2009: Coldplay Will Not be Denied." *Entertainment Weekly* no. 1032 (Jan 30, 2009):

[130] See J. Dolan and Norris, Binelli

Tha Carter IV was released in 2011 after considerable delay and generally received average, but not excellent, reviews from critics, especially in light of his monumental success in the previous three years. One such review demonstrates the critical response not only to his perceived lyrical flaws, but to the writer's perception of Lil Wayne's shift in rap persona. Ben Westoff writes, "he's not only lost his swagger, he's devolved into self-parody….He thought he was clever before, but now he's convinced he's a genius, a profound linguist who would probably tell a devastating limerick if he tried." Of course, evaluating ego and persona in rap are part of the qualitative judgments; however, here Westoff reveals the difficulty critics have with perceiving persona and the music itself as play or performance. He evaluates Lil Wayne negatively, because, the album's playfulness, most aptly demonstrated by the far more frequent use of puns, draws attention to the artist as manipulating the linguistic landscape. Wayne's line from the last track of the album, "This is Wayne's world and y'all are just some tourists" speaks to the manufactured nature of the relationship between artist and listener. Being from New Orleans, a city constantly performing for tourists, Lil Wayne has firsthand knowledge about the often exploitative relationship between tourist and resident. This relationship, where residents manufacture "authentic" experiences of place for tourists, seems to be what music critics yearn for in Wayne's music. Westoff's article speaks of disappointment with his effort, but is equally critical of the lack of transparency of the work. His article is one of several reviews that express a desire to hear more about Lil Wayne's life growing up, his family life, and his time spent in jail. This album's shift further away from the ghetto realism and towards extreme parody and linguistic play makes *Tha Carter IV* the third album in a series of albums that Lil Wayne has created to reinvent his image as one that can't be confined by the dictates of mainstream black

masculinity.[131]

This embrace of parody, performing his rap personas even to the point of caricature and contradiction (i.e., when feminizing metaphors simultaneously contradict and reaffirm his masculinity), reveals the potential subversive nature of Lil Wayne as a black cultural icon. Lil Wayne destabilizes black masculinity by making his image incoherently alien and his use of pun is linguistic destabilization. He assures his listeners that passive consumption of normal bodies and authentic narratives will is not possible with his newest music, revealing the instability of text, body, and gender. As Gaunt writes, "Although the system of gender identification always appears coherent and fixed, especially in mainstream hip-hop, it is in fact highly unstable and is only made stable though generalizations about gender roles."[132] Parody and pun are uniquely able to destabilize these norms.

In line with Butler and Adorno, Phiddian argues that parody effects a Derridian deconstruction. In concert with Phiddian, my argument is twofold: first, pun is parody at the level of the word—pun bears within the internal logic of deconstruction; second, Lil Wayne's performance of pun and parody effect destabilization of texts. This is not to negate the usefulness of Signifyin as a useful analytic of black culture texts. Of course when Derrida practiced deconstruction we can see its sympathies with the practice and effect of Signifyin. Phiddian describes Derridian deconstruction as, "nest[ing] in the structure of the texts and ideas it criticizes, as a cuckoo infiltrates and takes over the nests of other birds. It operates from inside the arguments of metaphysical texts and systems such as structuralism and phenomenology,

---

[131] See Sheffield, Rob Rolling Stone 1139 (Sep 15, 2011): 72; Wete, Brad. "Tha Carter IV (2011)." Entertainment Weekly (Sep 09, 2011): 1. Westhoff, Ben. "Swagger Deficit." *Washington City Paper*,2011.

[132] Gaunt, 176.

Showing how they cannot totalize the visions they proclaim, and precisely where they double and collapse."[43] This is work of the parody and the pun, or the rhetorical space of rap's "hyper masculinity" and the vehicle of its transmission.

By vigorously performing as parodies in seamless reiteration of "hyper masculinity," but doing so in ways that disrupt the possibility of seamless "hyper masculinity," i.e. through rhetoric that can't be replicated or performed by a brute, rappers ironically and energetically reveal of the alternative possibility of meanings for their masculinity. They make generalization impossible. Phiddian writes, "We cannot read parody as parody without being aware of how if differs from its model and what it itself purports to be on the surface. The reader's experience of relation is crucial, for parody cannot operate without the awareness of dialogue between texts and discourses," and later, "Parodies stand for the things they displace, but they do not merely repeat them, as translations aspire to do, or extend them like imitations. They displace, distort, differ, and defer." Deconstruction, parody (or rap's "hyper masculinity"), and I argue the pun force meaning into relational space rather than allowing the myth of the separation and essentialism to persist. In addition to his engagement of the feminine, recall Wayne's multiple lyrics that address and collapse the distance between performance and reality, for example, "Life is a movie that I've seen too many times," Although, like most rappers, Wayne continually makes overt appeals to the rhetoric of authenticity, he also reminds listeners that authenticity is a performance. Consider the energetic ambivalence of the lines from "MegaMan," "I don't talk it. I live it. I paint a picture vivid." Here he is affirming that he is a "real nigga all day and tomorrow," not just a talker while at the same time admitting the contradiction that his entire enterprise is in fact just talk—the artful talk of colorful imagery and symbolism, but still talk.[133]

---

[133] Phiddian, 678, 680-681. "Blunt Blowin" *Tha Carter IV.* Six Foot Seven Foot" *Tha Carter IV*

Lil Wayne presents a parodist exaggeration of "hyper masculinity," an absurd exaggerations that constantly indict listeners and watchers who see the reduction as the reality. But they do it with such necessary realism and authenticity is such an integral part of the enterprise. However, through his innovative use of Signifyin pun described in chapter two and his own resistance to model blackness (through his use of rock music and skateboarding), he continually remind us that he is only *acting* as himself.

The both/and inconsistencies can easily dissolve into a meaningless slush. Yet, even that meaninglessness (or logical inscrutability, understood here as vigorous and purposeful ambivalence) can be its own opening. Meaninglessness in itself contains the power to be more easily inhabited by people who have been traditionally seen as inscrutable and outside of the matrix of traditional meaning-making. Attali sees the potentiality in the meaninglessness that he sees as characteristic of late Capitalism's repetitive production. He writes, "the loss of meaning becomes the absence of imposed meaning, in other words meaning rediscovered by the act itself—composition: in which there is no longer any usage, any relation to others, except in the collective production and exchange of transcendence."[134] He acknowledges, however, that this sort of transcendent meaninglessness requires the eradication of all meaning. On the other hand, pockets of inscrutability may be a doubly subversive tool in a culture obsessed with knowing and consuming the oppressed. But, ultimately, in culture where symbols, and bodies acting as symbols of liberation, are violently detached from their origins (and in a cultural moment where origins, as in race, gender, and other markers of social location, are often deemed functionally irrelevant, often these evacuated and eternally unmoored, extra-terrestrial, and futuristic bodies) this meaninglessness especially in the mainstream is immediately pounced upon and make to mean

---

[134] Jacques Atalli, *Noise*, 45.

something traditionally productive. Perhaps we are always made to perform within restrictive and socially acceptable modes to survive. Helena Andrews, for example depicts black women as masking themselves as "bitches" for survival, saying "black women perform this ritual instinctively, so used to the consistent soundtrack of white noise that surrounds us," but later acknowledges that "this mask can suffocate rather than save."[135] The larger issue for me is not whether or not the mask is good, I suppose, but acknowledging the mask and providing a wider array of masks for black bodies.

More importantly, Lil Wayne's body performance and reception demonstrates how readings of hip hop artists' performances of black masculinity in particular have been reduced to its most historically resonant images. Lil Wayne's inscrutable body performance is read in ways that script him as an outlaw, hedonist, who gives little thought to himself as a performer. For example in his CBS interview with Katie Couric, Couric introduces a segment with the voiceover, "in a world of highly packaged stars, Wayne is an outlaw." This is not to say that Wayne isn't an outlaw in a cultural sense. It is to say, however, that other perhaps more traditional or non-resistant ways of reading his behavior is erased from mainstream readings of him. In the same interview Wayne of his lyrical prowess, "for me it was always a way of showing my intelligence. A way of showing who I am." It is striking that while his lyrics and image are most often analyzed for their content and for the image of Wayne as a bad boy, he describes his work as functioning to display a less salable image of black masculinity.

In this moment where indeterminacy is particularly in vogue, as scholars we have to be willing to outline, if only tentatively, boundaries between confusion and ambivalence. Exposing confusion exploits garbled iconography and rhetoric bound to the haphazard demands of the

---

[135] Rebecca Walker, Black Streams of Cool 33, 36.

market and encourages engaged consumption. While recognizing the possibility embedded in productive ambivalence allows us to imagine alternative routes to empowerment and benefit from meaningful diversity.

Chapter 4 Race and Replacement: Towards Redefining the Meaning of Cities

> "'You can't listen to most New Orleans music and listen to mine and compare. They're so different,' says Wayne. 'But how New Orleans is, my music is, we have this drive about us. We have this motivation. You see people on the corner, singing, and that takes a different type of pride to do that…But music, rap music I think that's where New Orleans comes in. We're relentless when it comes to music.'"[136]

As the quote above suggests, Lil Wayne does not consider the rap music he creates to bear the imprint of traditional New Orleans musical markers. But, this may have much to do with the ways that both New Orleans and its music have been crystallized and historicized in the narratives created by music studies, journalism, and the tourism industry. Music scholars and New Orleans promoters often see the Crescent City as a space for jazz and blues, particularly noting the brass band and parade culture as the authentic site of music creation. Jabir mentions this trend in his discussion of the absence of Mahalia Jackson in tributes and commentary following Katrina, saying "Perhaps this oversight is due to the fact that Jackson rose to prominence after she left New Orleans for Chicago. Or, it could have more to do with the ways the canon of New Orleans music is recognized exclusively through the lenses of blues and jazz, the signature genres of the lucrative New Orleans tourist industry."[137] Of all the genres, jazz seems most fully worked into the cultural memory of New Orleans, but even pinpointing New Orleans as birthplace of jazz probably obscures more about the fluidity of musical creation than it illuminates. Understanding musical flows and typifying them into genres, marked by a revered cast of founding fathers with linear trajectories through distinct spaces, is almost always retroactive work of distillation. Edwards' assertion that "New Orleans

---

[136] Mark Binelli, "Life on Planet Wayne," *Rolling Stone*, April 16, 2009, 43-47, 73-74 http://proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu/.

[137] Johari Jabir, "On Conjuring Mahalia: Mahalia Jackson, New Orleans, and the Sanctified Swing" *American Quarterly* 61. 3 (2009): 649.

is a fiction",[138] is even truer when restricted to the jazz narratives that have been created in relationship to the city.

Still, the unique racial history of New Orleans made the city an ideal space for musical innovation during what would become the nation's first popular music craze. The unique mixture of national and cultural influences was combined with the formal collapsing of creole and black identities into black as a function of Jim Crow legislation. Although this legal shift didn't mean that people immediately started jamming together, specific musical differences between black and Creole bands fostered a productive combination. The black string and brass bands privileged "blues-drenched" aural transmission, while the Creole bands favored "instrumental virtuosity, musical literacy, and training in classical music."[139] It's easy to see how improvisation, a fundamental element of jazz, could arise as more emotional and intuitive blues mixed with more structured and technical classical training. This late nineteenth century and early twentieth century phenomenon combined with the *laissez-faire* approach to sanctioned debauchery, in the form of prostitution, revelry, and drunkenness pouring from the streets of Storyville, the city's red-light district. The musical innovation created through this historical moment highlights the ways that musical mixture, identity, and innovation are outcroppings of specific legal and material realities of place.

As many musical and cultural historians have noted, New Orleans' oil boom, economic, and musical relevance for the nation peaked in the mid-seventies and showed steady decline in the eighties. As Cooper argued in 2008, "southern Louisiana hasn't been a potent force of the

---

[138] Louis Edwards, "Little Road Trips from Hell" *Callalloo* 34.1 (2011): 63.
[139] Kip Lornell, *From Jubilee to Hip Hop, 147.*

national music scene for several decades."[140] Instead of building the infrastructure to sustain New Orleans as city where black popular hits were made, city planners invested in the cultivation and rehabilitation of safe and performative musical events and tours where outsiders felt welcome. However, using communal adaptation practices embedded in the local landscape, some of the city's most disadvantaged negotiated the differential treatment of poor and black people in the city to create music that spoke to wider audiences and with national success. Thus, from post-Katrina New Orleans, the most unlikely of spaces, emerged hip hop's most celebrated entrepreneurs and the artist with the most popular album in 2008. Moreover, New Orleans is home to or directly influenced arguably the most successful cadre of black male musicians and executives in the hip hop in the late nineties and the first decade of the twenty-first century from any comparable city, outpacing most twice its size. In addition to being a historical site of musical, cultural, and national flux, black New Orleans was plagued in the Hip Hop Era with upsurges in violence, political corruption and neglect, unemployment, and police ineffective at protecting or serving. As in most urban centers in the U.S., however, racist practices and differential inclusion are not relegated to pre-civil rights era legal and social practice. Therefore, this chapter addresses the ways that black New Orleans operated as a musical city within an otherwise declining city between 1980-2010. Further, returning to Lil Wayne's introductory assessment of his own work. I will look at the ways that his musical production bears the markers of the New Orleans' legacy in form and content.

This chapter's three goals situate it at the interstices of music studies, cultural geography, and black studies. First, in outlining the particular usefulness of studying a city

---

[140] B. Lee Cooper "'Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?' Discovery, Dominance, and Decline of Crescent City Popular Music influence, 1946-2006" *Popular Music and Society* 31.2 (2008): 152.

with high levels of musical output in distinction to other geographical or statistical formulations, I aim to help reformulate the ways that the city defines its power. This first section, What Makes a City Sing, looks at the elements that make a musical city important, defining it in more fleshed out terms than center and periphery or economically powerful and weak. This section will also look at how New Orleans operates as a musical city within this schema. Second, in the section Race in Place, I will look at New Orleans not only as a musical city, but as a case study of a black musical city, ironically defined not by formal support and infrastructure, but by informal, musical responses to neglect, racial oppression, and segregation. The third section, Lil Weezyana, I am New Orleans, will look to one of New Orleans own, Lil Wayne and analyze the ways that he does and doesn't perform "New Orleans Music."

The history of New Orleans is rife with tales of reversals of fortunes and extreme cultural, economic, and social shifts as unpredictable as the weather that perennially threatens the city. It was both the wealthiest and poorest city in the South over a span of only a couple decades, rising out of marshy swamps so uninhabitable Native people historically refused to settle there. Even before "white flight" and the demographic shifts in the latter half of the twentieth century that turned the city into what Mayor Nagin infamously called a "chocolate city," New Orleans was over half black several periods in its past beginning as early as 1721.[141] When writers discuss New Orleans they almost always imagining it as a dynamic space of decay, decadence, renewal, and reinvention, a city that seems in cultural memory always to have been performing exotically for tourists.

Even though New Orleans has prompted some of the lushest prose in music writing, the

---

[141] Louise McKinney, *New Orleans: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2006: 21, 14, 15.

neglect of the city for its constituents[142] seems to have spread into music studies and cultural geography even in an academic landscape increasingly discoursed in terms of locality, fragmentation, and plurality. While much of globalization literature focuses on new transnational webs and networks of power that are coming into being, it increasingly eradicates the spaces, places, and people that are less able to project their economic power across the world. As Sassan notes, "most cities…including most large cities, are not part of these new transnational urban systems."[143] Further, Friedmann invites us to "consider that remnant – a majority of the world's population – that for all practical purposes is excluded from the capitalist 'space of accumulation' and consequentially also from world city analysis."[144] These trends in globalization scholarship create an ironically shrinking system that assumes that trends toward the mega-city and the exclusion of all but the super-rich is the only way forward for global cities scholarship. Formulations of reality as increasingly global and interconnected may obscure the fact that these popular trends serve to create a political and strategic ontology that situates the *real* city as the one that is most thoroughly enmeshed in a global hierarchy; thus, nationally and ephemerally relevant cities literally fall of the map.

In this fundamentally capital-driven ontology, even urban studies scholars' most

---

[142] The ways that this neglect that was made acute by the unnatural disaster of the Levees failure and the natural disaster of Katrina is described in *Come Hell or High Water* as part of an ongoing pattern of neglect and discrimination at the local, state and national level. In this text Michael Eric Dyson outlines the magnitude of this neglect and its racial character.

[143] Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2006), 45. Also, Knox writes that as "intriguing and significant as global metropolitanism may be, we should not lose sight of the fact that we are talking here about phenomena that directly affect only a fraction of the world's population." Paul Knox and Peter J. Taylor, *World Cities in a World-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14.

[144] John Friedmann, "Where We Stand: a Decade of World City Research," in *World Cities in a World-System,* ed. Paul Knox and Peter J. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 21.

fleshed out cosmopolitan definitions of the city employ only a slightly revised modern ideal: real education in the university, real music in the symphony, and real commerce in banks[145]. These notions of cosmopolitanism, however, are nebulous and many theoretical approaches, rather than struggling with defining what it means to be cosmopolitan, have increasingly narrowed the scope of their definitions of cities. In focusing on music and looking at the spaces that foster it, my first objective, building on the scholarship that defines the city in terms of the cosmopolitan, is to compare musical centers in the U.S. with a focus on New Orleans to the cities that are generally defined as power centers.

As Molotch writes, "Goods contain—in the details of their fabrication and outcome — the places of their origin. Products can be tracers to the nature of the places they come from."[146] "Published in 1948 *The Arts in Modern American Civilization* represents a seminal text in American Studies, providing scholars with unique methodology for analyzing American cultural production. As Americans exited a second great war victorious, the time seemed particularly appropriate for more sustained analysis about what it meant to be American and how that unique identity might be represented in the culture we consumed and created. In contrast to the scholarship of American artistic invention that had come before, Kouwenhoven explicitly attempted to create a model of American art that was not merely an imitation of European art, a model that more accurately reflected the now established prominence of the United States. The analysis, full of unbridled cultural nationalism, describes the invisible and indomitable American spirit as manifested itself in the tools and machines that everyday folks

---

[145] Peter Hall's concept of enterprise zones and Patrick Geddes' formulation of the city as made beautiful for its inhabitants is vital to this discussion even as these concepts are often used against the most disadvantaged classes.

[146] Harvey Molotch, "Place in Product" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research V*ol. 26 No. 4 (2002): 665.

created to meet the challenges of the American landscape. This argument, which for him is grounded in American technology, is rooted in his assertion that American machinery was developed in innovative response to lack of access to European markets, causing Americans to improve their tools rather than focusing on superficial and romantic flourishes. He argues throughout the text that even when this original constraint by necessity had lessened, economy of form "seem[ed] to have become especially characteristic."[147] The legacy of this do-it-yourself ethos flowed into art, and, for Kouwenhoven, remained rooted to "actuality, however ugly that actuality often was."[148] Thus, American consciousness, heroically defined in terms of realism, functionality, and flexibility, was reified in material culture.

While cultural studies scholarship has moved decidedly away from analyzing culture in terms of essentialist and prescriptive notions of cultural consciousness or psyche, Kouwenhoven's core premise that cultural products are both intentionally and unintentionally inscribed with markers of place still remains relevant for urban studies and cultural studies scholars. As Molotch writes, "Going offshore in search of cheaper production conditions does not just mean producing the same thing for less, it means producing something different."[149] Moreover, arguably this process of cultural imprint is more marked in arts and culture which have overt and intentional symbolic value for consumers. Again Molotch is instructive here:

> In a way more intense than other production sectors, an area's arts and culture industries press into local stuff. Virtually all places have culture industries, to whatever degree unsung or commercially unprofitable, in the form of galleries, art schools, theater groups, choirs, local publications, county fairs, craft shows, radio and TV stations, and so on. Artwork reverberates through the whole system, whatever the scale. It transfers into goods differently, depending on the kind of art in the geographic setting

---

147 John A. Kouwenhoven, *The Arts in Modern American Civilization* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1967, c1948), 23.
148 Ibid, 42.
149 Molotch, "Place in Product," 682.

> and the types of forces that thwart or facilitate its transfer into the goods.[150]

So, just as the culture industry operates differently that other industries, the cities that foster these industries are correspondingly structured differently. The city itself could be considered a cultural product that bears the mark of its cultural meaning and function. In the same way, following Bourdieu, Scott argues that music industry is unique among cultural producers as it "supplies a final product that has virtually no other interest to the consumer than its aesthetic and semiotic content."[151] Thus, as cities with higher musical activity grow, their structure more intensely represents this distinction between semiotic/aesthetic and utilitarian production. Howard Becker's essay discusses this concept in the context of the rise and fall of the significance of Kansas City as a jazz city in terms of the symbolic value of jazz for consumers in the 1920s and 30s. In this essay he notably relates the city's political corruption, jazz's association with illicit behavior, the likelihood of its performance being relegated to clubs and bars where listeners were less concerned with musical virtuosity to the rise of the jazz scene in Kansas City:

> In a setting like that, musical innovation flourished. The jam sessions allowed an experimentation with the new forms and ideas, and the chance to improvise at length, to play far beyond the time allowed by a disc or a dance set. There was no audience or the audience no longer cared what they were listening to. The setting for Kansas City changed radically in later years. Boss Pendergast went to prison for corruption and, by the 1950s, when I arrived there, that thriving jazz scene was comparatively dead.[152]

This description serves to exemplify the relationship between the music city's notorious volatility and the intensely symbolic nature of musical products.

---

[150] Ibid, 675.

[151] Allen John Scott, *The Cultural Economy of Cities: Essays on the Geography of Image-Producing Industries* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000) 113.

[152] Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.) 18.

As an intensely symbolic product that functions with intensely symbolic value, popular music additionally is more likely to be marked with the group dynamics of place. In Cowley's[153] discussion of the formulation of blues music in the rural south, he notes that music scholarship needs to be revised to acknowledge group dynamics particular to places in contradistinction to the tendency to assume music history can be understood in a linear chronology progressing from one musical master to the next. Similar to the acquisition of language, performers acquire musical skill and the rhetorics of a particular genre's flexibly and through informal settings. In this regard Cowley accords with the estimation of the music scene as being **"**not only where music is produced but also where taste and genre are derived."[154] Cowley presents evidence that demonstrates the possibility that the music of Chicago transplant, Muddy Waters, was influenced by social conditions at least as much as by either Robert Johnson or Son House.[155] Cowley cites Waters' interview in which Waters says that his verses "come from the cotton fields" that the "use of 'falsetto' for dramatic effect"[156] was incorporated by countless others besides Johnson. This, in addition to the influence of church music on Waters' music, indicates that the musical well from which Waters drew was ironically deeper and wider than previously imagined and indelibly marked by his residence in rural Mississippi and urban Chicago.

The different semiotic function of the music industry in cultural production is related to

---

[153] John Cowley, "Really the 'Walking Blues': Son House, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson and the Development of a Traditional Blues," *Popular Music* Vol. 1, (1981): 57-72.

[154] Florida et al, "Sonic City,"313.

[155] Cowley's article revises the common understanding of Robert Johnson as an uncontested influential figure in the creation of Muddy Waters' music. The article also highlights the problems of canonization in music historiography. omax's conclusions in creating the history of the Blues.

[156] Cowley, "Really the 'Walking Blues,'" 67, 68.

the industry's unique relationship to economies of scope and scale. According to Florida, Los Angeles and New York notwithstanding, musicians cluster, but don't necessarily respond to the largest recording industry locations: "While the recording industry appears locationally stable, the locations for musicians rise and fall fairly dramatically over time. The musical world is not becoming any `flatter', so to speak: The top twenty locations accounted for 37.6% of musicians and 41.8% of employed musicians in 2000. Yet, the specific locations have changed dramatically since 1970."[157] Thus, in contrast to other industries, musicians don't necessarily flock to the largest production centers. This allows for smaller cities to boast thriving and sustained music scenes, even as traditional markers of musical power are not present. Also, as the excerpt notes, although there is a consistent flux in the prominence of musical cities, the industry demonstrates a high level of clustering and benefits more that other industries from the agglomeration effects.

As Scott demonstrates in his extended analysis of Hollywood, the pop culture industry was historically more vertically disintegrated than other industries, "typified by an abundance of small and medium-sized firms caught up in extended transactional networks."[158] This quality of the culture industry is directly applicable to the music cities[159] as it also demonstrated this disintegration and the coordinating high likelihood of accumulation and flexible industrial organization even during the period of high Fordism. Thus, we can begin to see some of the relevant markers for the musical city: relevance on venues with high levels of symbolic value for participants and consumers (often related to a legacy of extra-legal

---

[157] Florida et al., "Music Scenes," 802.

[158] Allan John Scott, *On Hollywood, The Place, the Industry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6.

[159] This is especially relevant to those cities with less organized yet vibrant musical culture in distinction to those with powerful industry participants.

activity); communal organization where informal music training and appreciation can occur; and high-levels of industry-related clustering around music scenes that arise from higher agglomeration effects than are present in other industries. And yet, New Orleans, that has for decades sustained and produced lively music culture, has done comparatively little to cultivate its musicians and stabilize itself as a key player in the musical industry.

> "Before, we had Fats Domino, Louis Armstrong, Pete Fountain and Al Hirt but we didn't have a music industry; we had a music culture, Davis said. Then Jazz Fest shined a light on our local talent, which accelerated when we started bringing in national acts. That attracted national record companies and agents which started a whole evolution and revolution."[160]

In the quote above, Quint Davis, president of a company that helps to organize the New Orleans Jazz Fest, demonstrates a key difference in the development of (and some would argue the unnecessary stagnation of) the music industry in New Orleans even as he is trying to sing the praises of the city leadership. Here, he states that New Orleans "attracted" industry players, showing the reliance on specific events to attract outsider rather than the sustained investment in New Orleans' music industry at the city planning level. As Berry, Foose, and Jones argue in their history of New Orleans Music:

> "The city and state did more to lure film producers with generous tax credits for in-state shoots than in capitalizing a home-grown music industry…the underdeveloped music industry was a cold irony in light of the musicians' role in the billion dollar tourist industry. Millions of people visited the city, drawn to restaurants, architecture, music and antique stores. The state bought paid advertisements in TV spots and out-of-state

---

[160] Richard A. Webster, "New Orleans' Music Industry Hits High Notes Following Emergence of Festivals" originally in *New Orleans Citybusiness*, April 25, 2005.

newspapers, yet seemed oblivious to the potential for a TV series, both to boost careers and tourism."[161]

The remarkable effectiveness of these incentives is demonstrated by the fact that "Louisiana now boasts the 3rd largest film industry in the country."[162] According to the New Orleans Mayor's office of cultural economy, "a 30% investor tax credit is granted based upon the total in-state expenditures of a motion picture production. An additional 5% labor tax credit is given for the hiring of Louisiana residents."[163] This is compared to the 25% tax incentive given by the state solely for investment in "sound recording." The tax incentive for music may encourage people to record in Louisiana, but it does not encourage entrepreneurial music industry services, nor does it directly encourage job creation as the film incentive does.

Also, although many musicians are able to achieve and maintain some notoriety thought festival performances, their audiences are less likely to be made up of diehard fans, the type of fan that can be cultivated in a vibrant music scene. In his evaluation of the development of the music scene in Austin, Shank argues that the appeal to participate as a musician in the scene rather than an observer "arises out at a moment of recognition, when the scene appears as a signifying community, marked off from the rest of the surrounding world."[164] Thus, as Austin participates in the development of festival culture, it also maintains and supports the live venue as an integral part of the music scene. These venues provide musicians with the

---

[161] Jason Berry, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Jones, *Up from the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II*. (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press) 2009, 276.

[162] http://www.louisianaentertainment.gov/live/content.cfm?id=61

[163] http://www.filmneworleans.org/site277.php

[164] Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England): 1994, 122.

chance to participate in venues where "spectators become fans, fans become musicians,"[165] rather than spectators being primarily outsiders. This is extremely significant in the development of musical culture as the outsider is unfamiliar with the musical referents that are embedded in place and musicians learn to play for outsiders. In contrast to Austin, the festival crowd seems more likely to be made up of musical tourists who come to see the spectacular and momentary nature of the festival and experience New Orleans as a specific place in time. As Ellis Marsalis, pianist from one of the most famous musical families in the city said:

> My perception of an industry is something supported in a specific way like receiving a cash influx or government subsidies…The music industry here benefits primarily from very lax laws that permit music to be played on the streets, people to open clubs without having to close at a specific time and loose liquor laws like to-go cups. The city likes to think in terms of music being an industry but, unless working for tips constitute an industry, I don't see it. The festivals like Jazz Fest are great but they are more economic engines for the city, not ways musicians can jump start their careers.[166]

Even in a national economic downturn and in the aftermath of Katrina and the Levees Disaster, New Orleans has emerged as a city resolute in its dedication to tourist industry growth. In fact many hotels used the poverty and decline of the Orleans parish to qualify their hotel for luxurious renovations while receiving national tax credits (the "New Markets Tax Credits" for example). The charts below shows how this dedication to growth has paid off, making the city fifth in the nation as of March 2011 for both hotel occupancy and hotel room price.[167]

---

[165] Barry Shank, *Dissident Identities,* 131.

[166] Webster, "New Orleans Music Industry," 4.

[167] Data for charts are from the New Orleans CityBusiness Newspaper, Staff Reports, April

FIGURE 1: Average Hotel Price

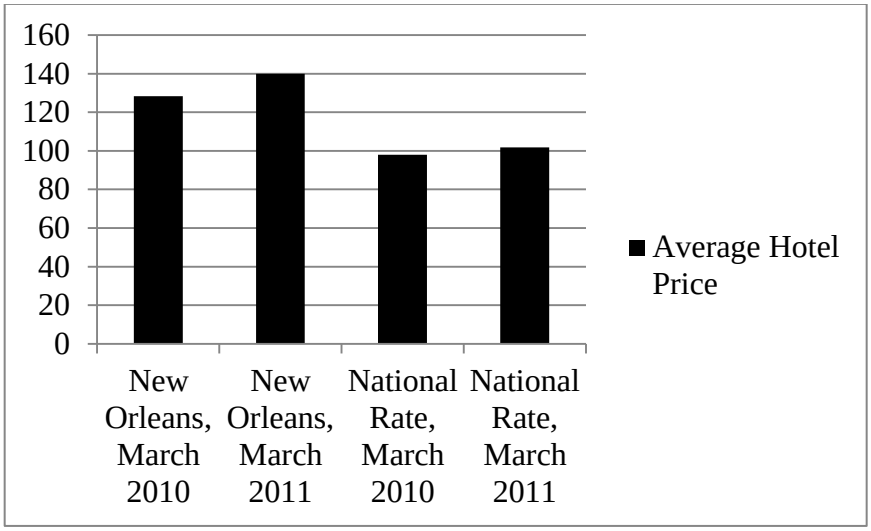
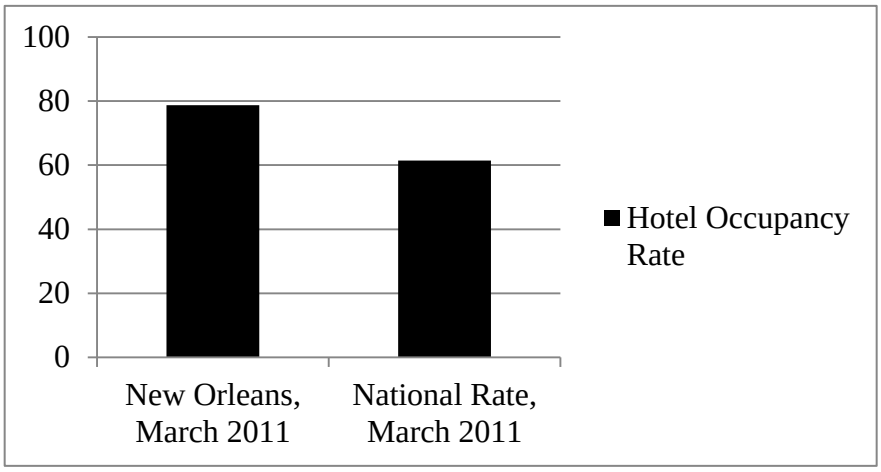


FIGURE 2: Hotel Occupancy Rate



The city-level decisions to manufacture a city in the mold of other traditional global cities as a space for tourism thwarts the promise of New Orleans often more than instability created by declining population levels and demographic shifts, because music cities often are able to outpace much larger locales. Outside of the two largest regions, musical cities respond differently to economies of scale. In his analysis of the dispersal of recording countries and

---

21, 2011. http://neworleanscitybusiness.com/blog/2011/04/21/new-orleans-hotel-occupancy-rises-to-fifth-in-nation-for-march/

critical recording activities he finds "a pattern that bears a notably uneven relationship to the underling geography of population…with some local points of focus in cities such as Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Miami, San Francisco and Seattle, but with many other large cities appearing simply as blanks."[168] This assessment is similar to Florida et al., as they found "that the relation between population and musicians or the recording industry holds for only the very large regions, not more generally for all regions."[169] This reaffirms that great music cities are often not found in the largest population centers.

Finally, as much of the previous section imagines the city to be space that fosters or hinders musical success, many current musical cities are increasingly aware and explicitly concerned with the marketing of those realities to tourists and this concern has also led to a shifting geography of the music city. As culture critics of late-capitalism turned their eye towards cities and the ways that manufacturing modes made impressions on the city-scape, many especially in the Frankfurt school argued that the reproduction of culture in the industrial age led to cities without authentic culture and that were shaped by capitalist and economic values rather than artistic and musical ones. As Scott writes "many of the metropolitan areas of the American Manufacturing Belt in particular (Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburg, etc.) now appeared to numerous commentators as the archetypes of the utilitarian, philistine city…The large industrial cities themselves were seen in many quarters as being given over to a symptom of 'placelessness' that critics like Relph (1976) ascribed to the increasing domination of technical rationality in mass society."[170] Many cities in the last few decades of the twentieth

---

[168] Allen John Scott, *The Cultural Economy of Cities: Essays on the Geography of Image-Producing Industries* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), 119.

[169] Florida et al., "Music Scenes," 801-802.

[170] Allen John Scott, *Social Economy of the Metropolis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 87.

centuries put on a public relations campaign or "place-marketing" to articulate their musical identity and were able to emerge during this period as unique or redefine themselves in terms of their creative output. Musical cities that emerged in the last twenty years seem more able than others to capitalize on their perceived histories of place.

However, in the process of place-branding New Orleans has less successfully than others supported the "local color" from which it derives its marketable authenticity. Like other elements of the city's informal culture, the black church in New Orleans and religious practice has taken on a different image when under the tourist view. "Although the Spiritual Churches are less well known than the second-line parades and have not been elevated to the status of icon, nevertheless, the tourism industry has appropriated their image as local color to construct the New Orleans tourist experience."[171] Thus, even as the church is a vital and natural element in musical training and performance, this too has been shaped by the increasing dominance of the tourist industry. In looking at New Orleans as a music city from the perspective of its inhabitants, Jacobs reminds us to think of the ways that tourist attractions become everyday experiences of celebration and the way everyday experiences become tourist attractions.

Although, I will discuss Lil Wayne's music at more length later, this recognition of the festival *as* common is seen in the way that Lil Wayne embeds in an offhand manner a list of iconic festivals as part of a description of a getaway scene in "Best Rapper Alive": "Sell his chain, celebrate, block party, second line, Zulu Ball, Essence Fest, Jazz Fest, Mardi Gras."[172] Rather than making any one a central icon, he collapses both formal and informal events as part of the cityscape. Even as the city does not seem to recognize the potential of these

---

[171] Claude F. Jacobs, "Folk for Whom? Tourist Guidebooks, Local Color, and the Spiritual Churches of New Orleans" *The Journal of American Folklore* 114: 453 (2001): 310.
[172] Dwayne Carter, "Best Rapper Alive" *Tha Carter II*, Cash Money Records, 2005.

spectacular events as part of the everyday experience of residents and capitalize on their possibility as informal spaces of musical and performance education, the residents themselves have moved to create smaller and more flexible pockets of industry using technology to create smaller recording studios, and at times record and distribute their own music. Even without tax incentives to encourage the proliferation of the music industry the number of recording services increased in the last two decades from 37 in 1995, to 61 in 2004, and of the 270 entries listed in *The Louisiana Music Directory* in 2009 there were 139 entries were listed as Recording Services in the New Orleans metro area alone.[173]

In moving towards defining the musical city in the first section, and demonstrating the extent to which New Orleans functions as one, this study additionally attempts to partly address the dialectic raised by Simon in the context of emergent power cities: "Whose cities are they and whom do they serve? How is control or regulation organized and by whom? How are different identities and representations scripted?"[174] Simon rightly questions the theoretical conceptions of global cities that assume cites have universal meanings for their inhabitants and visitors. In that vein, the second section of this study outlines the development of New Orleans as a musical center in the US, specializing in black popular forms. The section attempts to evaluate the ways that extra-musical activity fosters the growth of black popular forms, especially looking at cases where these forms achieved some measure of crossover success. The second section, Race in Place, discusses some potential reasons that New Orleans, even more unlikely than other musical cities, has been home to some of the most innovative and

---

[173]First two years of data were found in 276 *Up From the Cradle* and 2009 statistics were found in online music directory at:http://www.louisianamusicdirectory.com/dosearch.php?cat=6&subcat=&Title=&page=14.

[174] David Simon, "The World City Hypothesis", in *World Cities in a World-System*, ed. Paul Knox and Peter J. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 148.

significant black popular musicians in the twentieth and twenty first century.

The irony that the periods after emancipation rather than before are considered the nadir of the black experience in the South is reflected in the sonic imprint of southern music "born out of this double-moment of opportunity and denial."[175] While it may not be considered another valley of the black experience the hard right swing of US politics following the civil rights era created similar paradoxical feelings connected to economic realities of urban blight that gave rise to rap music. As Cobb indicates, "Nationally, the growth in the ratio between the mean income of the top 20 percent and bottom 20 percent of black families exceeded that for whites by 21 percent between 1966 and 2001."[176] As formerly middle-class families dipped in to poverty, upwardly mobile blacks were increasingly separate from their former communities. For New Orleanians, however, some of this movement away was mitigated by the fact that many prosperous musicians stayed within the city as whites moved to the outskirts. The development of black pop forms was aided by the fact that black musicians were able to sell CDs and mix-tapes consistently to an insider audience.

Almost all blacks who live in the metro area reside in Orleans Parrish. [177] Although New Orleans is often considered a vibrant space of social mixtures, it is highly segregated ethnically into parishes and wards. Although Katrina and the Levees disaster of 2005 has contributed to increased dispersal, for the vast majority of the Hip Hop Era black people in the New Orleans metro resided in Orleans Parrish. Also, Jefferson and Orleans Parrish

---

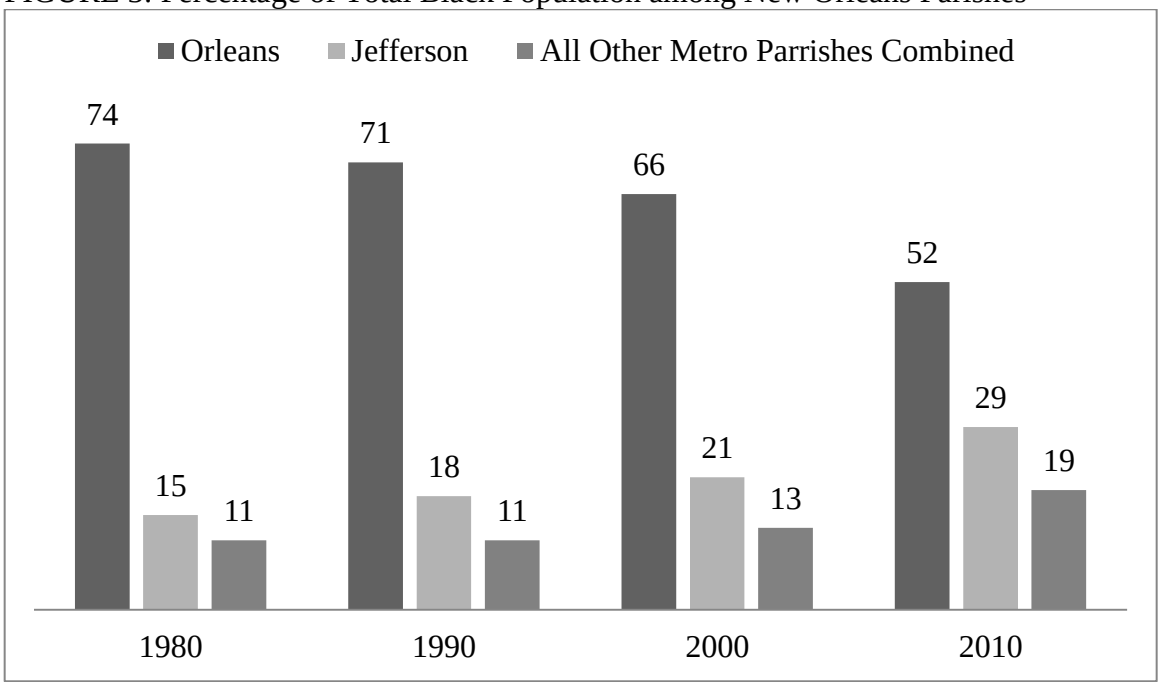
[175] Richard J. Powell, *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1989).

[176] James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[177] All statistical data in this section originates from U.S. census data as it was presented on the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center website: http://www.gnocdc.org/index.html. Notes associated with statistics provide the url for original data sets.

notwithstanding, even including most recent years, during this thirty year span, never more than 7% of the total black population lived in any of the other five parishes that make up the metro area. This means that even as blacks dispersed around the metro, the dispersal was fairly even and they did not seem to cluster in specific areas. Also, as the chart below indicates, Katrina and the Levees disaster, in concert with restrictions on housing and increased costs within the city has effectively shifted many black residents to outer parishes at twice the rate of earlier decades.

FIGURE 3: Percentage of Total Black Population among New Orleans Parishes



Although neighborhood statistics from 2010 are not available, the statistics below demonstrate the ways that blacks cluster in New Orleans in two specific neighborhoods central to the development of Brian "Baby" Williams and Lil Wayne. According to the 2000 census, the Hollygrove Neighborhood and the Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood were 94.7% and 98.3%

black respectively.[178] Being bounded within the landscape of neighborhood is central to the development and content of New Orleans music, as Griffin writes, "Indeed in New Orleans, musicians were 'made' in families and neighborhoods. For this reason they absorbed the lived history and present realities of their communities."[179] I will outline the ways that this absorption is manifested in Lil Wayne's music in the final section of this chapter, but first a few of the neighborhood characteristics are important to understand.

Lil Wayne was born and raised in the Hollygrove neighborhood. A neighborhood where, in 2000, 26.8% of households reported less than $10,000 in income, compared to the national average of 9.5 % and Louisiana average of 15.7%.[180] To further illustrate the condition of the neighborhood, the table below shows the educational attainment of the neighborhood in relationship to the surrounding parish, Louisiana, and the national averages. The highlighted sections are particularly of note, as they differ so sharply from the comparative population statistics.

---

[178] http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/3/12/people.html indicates demographics for Hollygrove and http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/8/22/people.html indicates demographics for Lower 9th Ward.

[179] Farah Griffin, "Children of Omar" *Journal of Urban History* 35:5 (2009): 663.

[180] http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/3/12/income.html

TABLE 2: Comparative Level of Formal Education (2000)[181]

	Hollygrove	Orleans Parish	Louisiana	United States
Total population 18 years and over	5,044	355,507	3,250,523	209,279,149
Less than 9th grade	11.9%	7.2%	8.4%	7.1%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	23.2%	18.2%	17.2%	13.2%
High school diploma or GED	29.9%	24.0%	32.0%	28.6%
Some college or Associate degree	24.6%	27.5%	25.6%	28.8%
Bachelor's degree and higher	10.4%	23.1%	16.8%	22.3%

Although New Orleans had experienced decline for some time, these statistics show how drastic the living conditions were for black people depending on the neighborhood that they lived in. However, these same conditions allowed for the development of high levels of cultural capital that helped sustain the image of black male hip hop artists as "authentic" in a market that required male artists to demonstrate their street credibility. Part of what made black artists viable in the market in the late 1990s and early 2000s is the very blight that plagued their lives. As the first section indicated, the mythology surrounding a musical venue is a central site of the production of authenticity. For black artists in New Orleans, the neighborhood and the family operate as both mythical and literal sites of the production of authenticity for listeners and inhabitants. Affiliation with a neighborhood marks the listeners as outsiders or insiders depending on their level of familiarity with New Orleans cultural geography. Although this process of marketing and consuming authenticity operates on some level for all music performers, black musicians, rappers particularly, are subject to more increased scrutiny.

---

[181] http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/3/12/edattainment.html

Competitive commodities in the global market must achieve some level of local sensibilities and familiarity for consumers of goods from different places. In seeming contrast, black popular music has historically derived much of its cultural capital from being an expression of difference. It stands to reason that people with less access to capital have less capacity for travel and by virtue of their class position more likely to be affiliated with one place for a longer period of time. As a result of this restricted access to alternate places and the reality that black Americans are consistently overrepresented in the poorer classes, conceptions of authentic representations of blackness increasingly become associated with urban poverty and crime. Molotch's metaphor for the ways that meaning is created in material culture is applicable here. He writes, "pushing a toaster lever with great force risks breaking the mechanism; the design must cue just the right response given time, place, and characteristics of the user. Products need a *semiotic handle* that works, and that handle depends — along with other contingencies — on the specificities arising from locale."[182] The *semiotic handle* that is created by mainstream critics of hip hop instructs listeners not only that the quality of hip hop increases in correlation to the artist's connection to place of origin, they also indicate that authentic blackness itself is bounded in specific locales. Cheyne and Binder's analysis demonstrates that "when critics identify rap with a distinctive place, they link the music to racial pride, politics, and the issues facing particular rap scenes. When critics do not identify the music with a particular place they concentrate on its negative aspects, particularly the homogenizing effects of the mass-market and stereotyped images found in studio produced music."[183] Thus, place itself is equated with quality assessment and an indicator of racial

---

[182] Molotch, "Place in Product," 672.

[183] A. Cheyne and A. Binder, "Cosmopolitan Preferences: The Constitutive Role of Place in

authenticity. Admittedly, hip hop is a genre where the particularity of the local urban landscape is prominent in its musical discourse. Many scholars have noted the combination of articulations of place and identity in black music. Artists consistently pay homage to their block and their city in the lyrics of their rhymes. Interestingly though, their study additionally shows that critics of rap music are much more likely to discuss the geographical location of the rap artist when they are discussing racial issues, this locational grounding is often linked to style, quality, and honesty.[184]

In addition to the prominence of city and place in racially-encoded music, black musical cities are often distinct from musical cities because of flourishing of race-specific industries and social networks that influence black music differently than others types of music. This is perhaps most evident in the influence of the black church. Even a cursory perusal of the most influential black artists of all time demonstrates the pervasive influence of the black church on the development of secular performers. Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke, Marvin Gaye, Otis Redding, and Stevie Wonder are just a few of artists trained informally by the black church that consistently make appearances in top ten list of all-time greatest musicians. This is especially salient for the development of performers from relatively small locales where traditional spaces of musical development are less developed. Maultsby notes that soul musical characteristics and centers of production were heavily influenced by the gospel tradition. This tradition, including hymns, spirituals, and modern gospel created much of the soundscape for the Civil Rights marches, sit-ins, and freedom rides. As Maultsby notes, the use of gospel to support Civil Rights political action caused "further blurring of the sacred

---

American Elite Taste for Hip-hop Music 1991-2005" *Poetics* 38. 3 (2010): 345.

[184] Ibid, 346.

secular boundaries."[185] For black music these boundaries were never distinct, as evident by the use of slave spirituals to support the cause of freedom and escape. Nevertheless, soul music's incorporation of gospel brought these intersections to the foreground of black consciousness and the mainstream. Thus, as was the case for Atlanta and New Orleans, black music blossomed in a richly musical, spiritual and religious environment.

During the course of research, I noted a surprising lacuna in the study of the black church in New Orleans. In many ways it seems like the image of New Orleans as a place of debauchery and secular abandon seems to preempt scholars from seeing the New Orleanian black church as a key element of music history or religious studies.[186] This absence notwithstanding, the black church in New Orleans as a collective in the city has often worked to bridge the gap in governmental assistance and economic empowerment, merging the social and spiritual. Nik Cohn[187] describes the neighborhood as a space where church, crime, and rap intersect within the same landscape, describing the Third Ward of New Orleans[188] as "a

---

[185] In *African American Music: An Introduction*. Burnim, Mellonee V., and Portia K. Maultsby, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 271.

[186] This may also be due to the fact that some of the most historically prominent black churches are also Catholic. Anderson's *Black, White, and Catholic: New Orleans Interracialism, 1947-1956*, shows some movement in understanding the centrality of the church, but its focus on Catholicism may keep it in some ways from being understood in dialogue with scholarship about the Black Church as an institution of resistance in the U.S.

[187] Like a Tyler Perry riff, Cohn's menacing characters are described with spectacular Blackness, arrogant, churchy, and without patience for the whiteness that Cohn constantly alludes to with discomfort. While his description of the city is valuable, the continual references to gold teeth, Popeye's Chicken, and laziness seem to verge on stereotypes often in his text.

[188] The birthplace of No Limit brothers, Percy Miller, aka Master P, Vyshonn Miller, aka Silkk the Shocker, Corey Miller, aka C-Murder; rappers Terius Gray, aka Juvenile, Tab Virgil, Jr, aka Turk, McKinley Phipps, aka Mac, the late James Tapp, Jr., aka Soulja Slim; and Cash Money Records founders, Bryan Williams, aka Birdman, aka Baby, and Ronald Williams, aka Slim.

stronghold of gospel churches. Sunday mornings belonged to suits and white dresses, church ladies in picture hats. The rest of the week, its heroes were dope dealers and rappers."[189] This church often produced practical responses to black New Orleans' citizens in need, as seen in the aftermath of Katrina and the Levees disaster. A New York Times article stated, "New Orleans's patchy recovery has largely bypassed places where the working class and the poor lived, like Central City and the Lower Ninth Ward….Instead, churches and groups with religious affiliations, citing Scripture's call to help the stranger and the neighbor, have taken on building affordable housing."[190] This assessment coincides with a Health Policy Institute report that noted that even without formal training or emergency preparedness plans "African American religious leaders stepped up to the challenge of crisis leadership to provide the missing public health safety net for dislocated evacuees."[191] This response to crisis demonstrates that, like the neighborhood and the family, New Orleans musicians have found practical assistance adaptation skills from black churches. Diversity, flexibility, and practicality of religious practice seem to create a fertile backdrop to New Orleans music-making.

Similar to the specific social institutions that fostered the music of black people, the differing conditions of the black experience in cities, promoted the rise of black forms and companies in genres that were tied to the unique conditions of cities. Stagnation and decline of the music industry writ large or the decline of a mainstream genre's prominence in a city was often historically did not equate with the stagnation of black genres. Often the opposite was the

---

[189] Nik Cohn, *Triksta: Life and Death and New Orleans Rap* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 19.
[190] Neela Banderjee, "In New Orleans, Rebuilding with Faith" *New York Times,* October 26, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/26/us/26churches.html
[191] Karyn Trader-Leigh, "Understanding the Role of African American Churches and Clergy in Community Crisis Response" (Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies 2008), 4.

case as black performers and participants became more relevant to the city as alternatives became passé. This is seen most clearly in the case of New Orleans which as Florida notes, has been subject to general decline in standard markers of musical power.[192] Although its legacy of a thriving musical center declined and many artists with crossover success left for larger venues, surprisingly "many more stayed in a city which had, at best, a marginal recording industry."[193] To offset the decline and lack of infrastructure, these artists followed the trend set in other black music cities, by using networks embedded in communities and making deals with outside the city for distribution.

Thus, although incredibly significant centers of black musical collaboration, innovation, and influence can rise without the standard pre-requisites for success, they also have greater difficulty sustaining that success without making eventual connections to larger firms in other cities that can distribute and market their work to larger audiences. This is demonstrated in the entrepreneurial success that led to the emergence of Lil Wayne as New Orleans most recent superstar. The quote below demonstrates the ways that both No Limit and Cash Money Records positioned themselves as homegrown labels with in house production teams that were viable enough to secure the necessary connections outside of New Orleans to become world market players:

> Meanwhile, the New Orleans underground hip-hop scene was beginning to blow up. Master P and his self-financed No Limit label had just signed a huge deal with Priority Records after a series of regional hits, and other labels were beginning to look for local talent. Wayne's stepfather, Reginald "Rabbit" McDonald - whom Wayne describes as a drug dealer on one of his mixtapes - paid $700 to have Mannie Fresh, Cash Money's in-house producer, record a demo for Wayne; at the time, Cash Money was a year away from breaking out of local notoriety and signing its own lucrative deal with

---

[192] Florida et al,. "Sonic City," 319.

[193] Jason Berry, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Jones, *Up from the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2009), 6.

Universal.[194]

In this interview Wayne discusses the importance of his stepfather in the first movements of his career. This legacy of family is woven in to the fabric of New Orleans music-making. Le Menestrel and Henry say as much when they state, "The essential role of kin in the acquisition and transition of skills and tastes, one of the hallmarks of New Orleans music, had been extensively documented, especially in the case of contemporary musical families such as the Marsalises, the Nevilles, the Connicks, the Bouttes, to name a few."[195] In the case of New Orleans hip hop, both Cash Money Records and No-Limit Records bear the stamp of family. Cash Money was co-founded by brothers Brian and Ronald Williams and while No Limit was founded solely by Percy Miller, aka Master P, the label supported ventures by Millers brothers Vyshonn Miller, aka Silkk the Shocker, Corey Miller, aka C-Murder, and later Master P's son Romeo Miller. This familial support often disrupted the emergence of other, arguably better, talent on the label. In the case of Cash Money Records, Lil Wayne's development was further encouraged by the co-founder of Cash Money records, Brian Williams, aka "Birdman" aka "Baby" whom he calls his father. This expression of kinship is most prominent in his album *Like Father, Like Son,* but shows up throughout his work in his self-naming. This is particularly relevant in the discourse of New Orleans, Black patterns of fictive kinship, and the rap scene. In a genre so thoroughly anxious about homosexual relationship, Lil Wayne famously kissed Brian Williams on the mouth and often refers to himself as Birdman J.R. and to Brian Williams as his "pa" and "daddy." His openness with these shows of affection and endearment seem to indicate the extent to which coming from a musical family is part of the

---

[194] Mark Binelli, "Life on Planet Wayne," 74.

[195] A. Le Menestrel and J. Henry, "'Sing Us Back Home'" *Popular Music and Society* 33:2 (2010): 188.

New Orleans musical culture. In "Like Father, Like Son" Wayne articulates the extent of Birdman's influence on him saying, "Birdman put me on when I was just eleven. He was my teacher, so I was like fuck the lesson. He was my preacher so I was like fuck the reverend."[196]

Finally, as the previous section suggests the particularities of demographic movement and economic stability are race-specific and place-specific in ways that often influence the opportunity for black music and culture to flourish. While it is no new surprise that black people and other ethnic minorities are often disproportionately represented among the most disadvantaged classes, Scott's striking comparisons of major cities in the U.S. skillfully demonstrates the unevenness of this representation. For example, in Los Angeles in 2005, black people were almost twice as likely to be below the poverty line as white, but in Chicago they were well over three times as likely.[197] These wide differences in relative poverty often cause black people to follow different migration patterns than whites, leading to the expansion of cities that are more livable for blacks and a correlated increase in the musical possibilities of the city. A recent study by Black et al., correspondingly demonstrates that the cities in which the relative wages of black men have remained stable or increased between 1970 and 2000, correlate to the same cities that have been[198] black centers for music. Conversely, after Katrina and the Levees disaster, according to Graham, "as early as September 2005, black residents of Louisiana and Mississippi desperate for employment had been shut out of the reconstruction

---

[196] Dwayne Carter, "Like Father, Like Son" *Like Father, Like Son*, Cash Money Records, 2006.

[197] Allen John Scott, *Social Economy*, 119.

[198] D.A. Black, N.A. Kolesnikova, N.A., and L.J. Taylor, L.J. "The Economic Progress of African Americans in Urban Areas: A Tale of 14 Cities" *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* 92: 5 (2010): 361.

labor market."[199] This collusion between contractors looking for increasingly cheap labor and governmental agencies is reflected in the geographic dispersion described earlier as black residents often were forced out of the Orleans parish to get work.

Generally, rappers from the US South are assessed as making trashy hip hop or bubblegum rap. Every year a "new" dance track comes out and crosses into the mainstream with a simplified repetitive chorus and polyrhythmic sound, Miami's Bass music, Atlanta's Snap/Crunk music, and New Orleans' Bounce music are ready examples of this phenomenon. However, understanding dance as the object (or dance and music as operating in concert with each other) and contextualizing the music within the history of the US Black communal dance may uncover a more dynamic relationship of listeners to music.

Unlike musical products that promote passive acquiescence, dance music prompts listeners to symbolically turn away from productive action and to compete, collaborate, and communicate. It could be argued that the dance exists to sell another dance CD. However, with musical forms that are inextricably tied to dance, like much of Bounce Music from New Orleans, the music rarely exists without the activity it promotes. Hazzard-Donald says "Hip hop dance permits and encourages a public (and private) male bonding that simultaneously protects the participants from and presents a challenge to the racist society that marginalized them."[200] Although the bulk of Cooper's article (a quote from which serves as the lead-in to this section) pictures New Orleans as a city in musical decline, the success of dance music for New Orleans rap artists is nonetheless relevant for black rappers from New Orleans. "Back that

---

[199] Allison Graham, "Free at Last" *Journal of American Studies* 44:3 (2010): 604.

[200] Katrina Hazzard-Donals, "Dance in Hip Hop Culture" chapter in Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman's *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge) 2004:572.

Azz Up," "Wobble," and "Lollipop" all represent breakout popular dance hits that were certified club-bangers and relied on infectious, highly repetitive choruses and verses to achieve such marketable crossover success. For example, Juvenile repeats "Yeah" twenty-six times in the first verse of "Back that Azz Up" alone. In doing this, he creates call-and-response spaces for listeners to join in even if they are unable to follow along with the quick and accented delivery.

Further, as Griffin says, "young hip-hop artists long documented the poverty and crime under which many of them lived in a Pre-Katrina New Orleans. They lifted the veil on life beyond the French Quarter…and managed to do this while making sure their listeners continued to dance."[201] Although all three videos music videos for these songs are located in the informal spaces for dance and music acquisition, "Back that Azz Up" and "Wobble" are located outside on blocks, revealing the urban landscape of the South to mainstream viewers. The aforementioned quote from Lil Wayne's song "Best Rapper Alive" speaks to the seamlessness of the urban landscape, where, while the tourist industry continually polices districts in New Orleans to be a safe space fun, the Lil Wayne sees the danger lurking just beyond, even tied into, the revelry.

Many scholars talking about the implications of a musical genre on culture begin with arguments grounded in the concept that the aesthetic is not just a system of forms but a way of seeing the world, a philosophy of being, of doing, of seeing, and of being seen (or rendered invisible). As mentioned in earlier sections, music functions as a highly semiotic product, using its symbolic content to articulate and often revise the value of signifiers for listeners. Rap, like

---

[201] Juvenile's "Ha" and the video is a particularly salient example of this ambivalence whose rhetoric deserves full treatment in its own right. Citation is from Farah Griffin, "Children of Omar" *Journal of Urban History* 35:5 (2009):663.

any other expression of Black people, resists simplistic definitions. Consistent with the Black aesthetic tradition of *Signifyin(g),* wildly successful artists also rep Black lyrical power by inverting and repositioning cultural references, previously raced for others. This section shows Lil Wayne to be an artist aware of his locational blackness and interested in sending shouts out to the hood from his position of wealth and affiliating himself with a New Orleanian scene. Alim states that "foregrounding the streets at the site, sound, and soul of hiphopological activity allows one to gain a more thorough understanding of the origins and sociocultural context of hip hop culture."[202] He uses New Orleans specifics in tandem with references that place him outside of the city's boundaries. This section focuses not only on the type of references Carter uses to refer to himself, but how he uses these references. Carter's music indicates that, while he stubbornly articulates alliance with the streets he also increasingly redirects the mainstream image to flow through his music. Thus, while we see a clear increase in the proper noun references to wider publics and non-black culture those references are rarely the point; his redirection points listeners back to himself and the streets of New Orleans.

In this section I used musical data primarily from two Lil Wayne CDs, *500 Degreez* (2002) and *Tha Carter III* (2008). This study focuses exclusively on one small aspect of the Lil Wayne's artistic production; he has created nine studio albums, and in 2007 alone he leaked over 200 songs on the internet. I acknowledge that this work does little to demonstrate Dwayne Carter's creative genius and prolific output. It is not intended to be the last word on Carter or hip hop. Rather, I hope it will encourage scholars to investigate his work more intensely.

A Note on Methodology: Using the same methods described in chapter two, I have coded proper noun references to selfhood as hood-specific, black, and non-black. This section

---

[202] Alim, "Hip Hop Nation Language," 390.

will deal with hood specific references in dialogue with the ways that Lil Wayne affiliates himself with New Orleans streets. Other data will be analyzed in the next two chapters describing articulation of selfhood in relationship to blackness and the US as a nation. By reference to selfhood I mean instances in the music where Wayne is explicitly articulating his own identity by referring to an object or individual outside of himself.

I'm so Hollygrove I should be the logo. Hood specific references to identity included explicit references to identification that affiliated Lil Wayne as from a New Orleans block, i.e. "a Seventeenth nigga", "Hollygrove" and "Apple Street Animal." Counting these as proper noun referential phrases adheres to the conventional definition of the proper noun phrase. However, after some ambivalence, I have also counted shout outs that are traditionally defined as interjections, when they are direct references to a proper noun. Thus, instances of "soo-woo" and "soo-woop" are counted as they are specific locating referents to a proper noun, The Bloods. I did not expand this concept to count what might be more general hood referents like "tears in my face" or "I wear a bandana". Similarly, since region is central to the discussion of Lil Wayne's identity, though I will discuss images of southernness further in the next chapter, I have included proper noun references to the South in this discussion. The table below outlines the distribution of proper noun phrases from both CDs.

TABLE 3: Geographic Proper Nouns

	All proper noun references to hood, street, click, or location	Proper noun references to "New Orleans"	Proper noun references to the 17th Ward	Proper noun references to Hollygrove	Proper noun references to streets in Hollygrove
500 Degreez	14	3	3	1	3
Percentage of Total	100%	21.4%	21.4%	7.1%	21.4%
Tha Carter III	16	3	2	4	5
Percentage of Total	100%	18.75%	12.5%	25%	31.25%
Percent Change	N/A[203]	-2.65	-8.9%	+17.9%	+9.85%

In this brief analysis I discuss some of Lil Wayne's uses of what I call *geographic proper nouns phrases*, as these phrases literally locate him in place. Use of mainstream proper nouns as evidence of his use of the black rhetorical practice of *Signifyin(g)* will be discussed in the next chapter at length, but it is significant to recall for this discussion one of the goals of Wayne's use of *Signifyin(g)* is to stake metaphorical claim to spaces that he was denied access to. Also, for this discussion, the significance of pulling back the veil of New Orleans as safe space for revelry is seen at play, especially in his references to places outside of the ward in which he was born. Beginning with those references that locate him outside of his ward, this analysis will then proceed to analyze his references to New Orleans.

It is the rare case that Lil Wayne acknowledges districts in New Orleans outside of his own in reference to himself. This seems particularly relevant, in that many of these spaces are

[203] Because this double CD included more tracks, the increase in number of references isn't necessarily significant.

marketed as historical and static sites of revelry and music-making. He raps, "I'm gon round up the whole **Uptown**. We gon burn this bitch to the ground,"[204] turning a district that is relegated in historical formulations as the place where jazz began into a presently occupied territory, full of like-minded soldiers, ready to take action, perhaps retributive action, if need be. The danger inscribed in his lyrical use of space is also linked to the threat and use of riot as resistance in the black community.[205] In two other examples of scripting space, he raps "*Now* I'm getting head on the balcony on **Bourbon**"[206] and "[I'll] Be [there] in the morning at **Gentilly**/Whole key go for 20, half a key go for 11,"[207] placing himself in other New Orleans spaces as a participant in the merrymaking scene on Bourbon Street and as a dealer so in control of space that he can move outside of his turf and conduct business. While one could argue that conspicuous consumption *is* antithetical to mainstream constructions of black New Orleans, he does not use referents in a way that detaches them of its Eurocentric symbolism.

Similarly to the ways he moves beyond his ward to lay claim to space, is the ambivalence with which he defines himself in relationship to New Orleans. He describes himself as "the heart of New Orleans"[208] and says that after Katrina and the Levees disaster "now all we got is me to represent New Orleans, shit."[209] This representation of New Orleans as a city that must be protected pervades his lyrical commentary of disaster. In the same song

---

[204] Dwayne Carter, "Gangsta Shit" *500 Degreez*, Cash Money Records, 2002.

[205] However, it should be noted that historically far more property damage and violence was inflicted by whites setting fire to black communities to eradicate them from the urban landscape.

[206] Dwayne Carter, "Go Hard" *500 Degreez*, Cash Money Records, 2002.

[207] Dwayne Carter, "Let the Beat Build" *Tha Carter III*, Cash Money Records, 2008.

[208] Dwayne Carter, "Gangstas and Pimps" *500 Degreez*, Cash Money Records, 2002.

[209] Dwayne Carter, "Tie My Hands" *Tha Carter III*, Cash Money Records, 2008.

passionately reminds listeners that "My whole city underwater, some people still floatin'…Born right here in the USA, but, due to tragedy looked on by the whole world as a refugee. So, accept my emotion. Do not take it as an offensive gesture."[210] In this same moment, he situates himself as a resident of the city, imploring the public to read through his gestures of anger to see the tragedy and recognize the true victimhood of black citizens left to defend themselves against natural disasters and governmental failure.

On the other hand, on other albums, he describes Charity Hospital as a "city zoo"[211] and describes himself as being "Like Hitler, it's the New Orleans Nightmare."[212] Both of these references are layered with meaning that creates slippage in the standard representation of spaces. First, in comparing Charity Hospital to a zoo that he was born in, he revises the notion that the hospital is a place of respite and care. Instead he equates this with a space for onlookers to view caged animals. In the New Orleanian context this reminds listeners of the ways that black life is not welcomed, but put on display, regardless of their condition. This also, revision also works to situate himself as an overcomer of these locational hazards, even if they have shaped what he has become. This reading is underscored by his and other rappers ambivalent reference to themselves as apes, beasts, dogs, and gorillas. These specific rhetorical choices, like reclaiming "nigga" as a term of both familiarity and derision, demonstrate the trend of rappers to use *Signifyin(g)* to "flip the script" on mainstream notions of black humanity. This flipping and ambivalence shows up in the multiple readings of "New Orleans Nightmare" from the second example. Here Wayne is either a nightmare haunting New Orleans, a nightmare that the US has about the city, or an embodied nightmare caused by the

---

[210] Ibid.
[211] Dwayne Carter, "Leather So Soft" *Like Father, Like Son*, Cash Money Records, 2006.
[212] Dwayne Carter, "3Peat" *Tha Carter III*, Cash Money Records, 2008.

city itself. We could also read this line as saying that, like Hitler, Lil Wayne and black men like him have become a target for social scorn in a way that erase the contextual realities that lead to his development.

With the acrobatic linguistic innovation of hip hop artists, critics should be able to recognize hip hop's resistance to mainstream grammatical and symbolic convention; clearly Rap "is not only a Black expressive cultural phenomenon; it is at the same time, a resisting discourse, a set of communicative practices that constitute a text of resistance against White America's racism and its Eurocentric cultural dominance."[213] We see the destabilizing irreverence and resistance in even the most popular, seemingly apolitical rappers. However, Mitchell writes, in an article about "Resistance Vernaculars", "it is arguable that the ghetto vernacular practiced by many African-American rappers has become so atrophied and ossified in its relentless repetition of a severely limited range of explicatives that any claims for 'resistance' have long passed their use-by date."[214] Fortunately we have the music to listen to instead of just the critics: "This is southern face it. If we too simple, then y'all don't get the basics."[215]

Economic priorities manifested in city-level governmental decisions ironically impact those with the least ability to leave or to encourage leaders to make choices that sustain their districts. The rhetoric of this political and cultural era increasingly described as post-racial and discoursed in terms of equality of individual choice often obscures persistent, systematic legacies of racism endemic to the cultural landscape of urban centers in the US As social

---

[213] Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk*, 271.

[214] Harris Berger and Michael Thomas Carroll eds. *Global Pop, Local Language* (University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 3.

[215] Dwayne Carter, "Shooter" *Tha Carter II*, Cash Money Records, 2005.

justice activists organize with citizens to make these "endangered spaces"[216] and city planners turn their eye towards eradicating blight, both must incorporate and capitalize on community assets to make their cities functional, profitable, and sustainable. Arguments for sustainable growth must remember that "fair growth means dismantling artificial barriers that limit the social and economic mobility of African Americans and other racial groups and expanding opportunities."[217] These artificial barriers, like land use restrictions, preferential incentives, and privatization that impede the development of self-determining communities, have reshaped New Orleans to be a city that urban planners look back on decades from now as a case study in neglect and decline caused as a direct result of city-level infrastructure decisions.

However, the difficultly in discerning these barriers is the partly due to the way that planners follow capital-driven ideology in decision planning, assuming that the ideal model of the city is reshaping it to compete in global financial markets. For example, an excerpt from Act 478, responsible for the creation of the incentives for the New Orleans film industry, reads with the following passage struck out: "Encourage development of a Louisiana film, video, television, and digital production and postproduction infrastructure with state-of-the-art facilities."[218] The strikethrough remains, even in the online document online, demonstrating metaphorically and literally, the shift in the bill's purpose from developing local infrastructure to developing revenue. This shift in again rendered in the revision of the document where "or

---

[216] As Bullard writes in the *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century: Race, Power, and Politics of Place*, this danger is not merely cultural or economic but also environmental as Blacks are twice as likely to live in neighborhoods where pollution is the top threat to health.

[217] Robert D Bullard, *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century: Race, Power, and Politics of Place* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers) 2007: 21.

[218] http://www.louisianaentertainment.gov/film//files/00%20Act%20478%20-%20Motion%20Picture.pdf

internationally" is added to three of the definitions that originally merely read "nationally."[219] The logic of international competition is seen as an undisputed goal and marketed as organic and inevitable growth. In order to help make these realities apparent and lift the veil from cities like New Orleans, urban and cultural studies scholars have a moral obligation to evaluate "growth" that places a disproportionate share of the region's burden on citizens that are also simultaneously y denied access to both public and private goods arising from that growth.

Thus, even as musicians and residents negotiate their way through and out of neglected and endangered spaces, even as the promise of communal and cultural adaptation reveals a cadre of New Orleanians able to spin gold from straw, remarkably, inventively, the spectacular network of musical performance is not the narrative of New Orleans most in need of revision. The necessary revision is perhaps in the ways that writers see black death and oppression within cities like New Orleans as a function of individual choice as much as these monumental performers are seen as functioning because of individual genius. As place-marketing for international commerce revs up, music journalists seem complicit in the denial of place as a constitutive factor and the denial of structural responsibility. Nik Cohn's, *Triksta: Life and Death and New Orleans Rap*, lauded in *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Los Angeles Times Book Review* (just to name a few of the highly respected outlets lining up to submit favorable, blurb-worthy reviews), shockingly ascribes this black death narrative onto the late James A' Darryl Tapp aka Soulja Slim:

> The self-hating in this was terrible. What posed as defiance—*Fuck you, nigga*—had in fact been abject surrender. In facing down physical fear, Slim had bowed to the deeper fear of seeming weak. But humans *are* weak; this is our humanity. By denying it, we

---

[219] See lines 11, 13, and 20 of Act 478, http://www.louisianaentertainment.gov/film//files/00%20Act%20478%20-%20Motion%20Picture.pdf

deny our own nature. Who had killed Daryll Tapp? Soulja Slim.[220]

This shocking displacement of guilt, where black male victims become the perpetrators of even their own murders represents, for me, the extension of the place-making strategies their hidden logic that both encumbers cultural development and profits from it. The evaluation of decontextualized, placeless black bodies ironically erases the authentic subject and impedes productive pathways to situated, material agency.

---

[220] Nik Cohn, *Triksta: Life and Death and New Orleans Rap* (New York: Knopf) 2005: 34.

Chapter 5 Who We Are When We Are Here

"Home of the burning church, Don't know much about the world, Home of the pocket stones, Home of the booty songs, Home of the fingerwave that lasts all night long…Got about a hundred friends that aint caught on to trends"
Southern Gul, Erykah Badu

"Racism or 'Southern heritage'? Whose 'Southern heritage'? Has the South been, and does it remain, a unique region in the United States? Is it the United States' Quebec"

As hip hop music expanded into an indisputable product and culture American mainstream exploitative practices, hierarchies, and oppressive images were replicated in the industry. One such image is the image of the South as historical, backwards, rural, and static. While county musicians capitalize on these images of rustic rebels, hip hop artists have had to negotiate a more nuanced articulation of southern pride that reflects the tangled legacy of blacks in the US South. Ironically black southern rappers from Atlanta, New Orleans, and Miami were put in a defensive stance by a music industry that replicated mainstream images of southerners as white and rural and at the same time refused to give southern artists radio play and recognition in hip hop media outlets. Although Lil Wayne often vehemently resists the conception of southern rappers as lacking quality, he notably slips in *Da Drought III* calling himself the "only down south rapper could've been in the Firm or the Commission or Wu Tang." In naming highly visible groups from New York City as the standard bearers in hip hop, he acknowledges the exclusion of southern rappers from the upper echelon and makes himself the exception. As Richardson notes, "While southern rappers invoke the concept of 'representin'' that is so fundamental to rap, they have primarily used the concept to reflect their ongoing effort to make legible a South that has long been invisible in the rap industry." Richardson's text goes far to demonstrate the centrality of conceptions of geography in the formulation of masculinity, but the

even this text replicates the erasure of southern urban spaces from the popular imagination by highlighting the rappers like Nappy Roots who and not demonstrating the ways that southern "Gangstas" and "Playas" understand themselves as southern and citified. It is also of note that rap music's reclamation of southern identity is not outside of historical formulations of black southern identity. Following Potter, Watts writes that black southerners readily identify with southernness because of their more distinctive folk culture:

> David Potter's theory that the persistence of a folk culture makes the South distinctive, he observes that black Southerners may even experience this Southern folk culture to a larger degree than whites. This could be read as saying that African American Southerners are not only Southern but are even *more Southern* than white Southerners.

Musically, this distinctive folk culture was seen in the cultivation of a vibrant and thriving local music culture, even as artists have only in recent years been considered part of the cultural geography of hip hop. Southern black rappers fused many pairs of terms that were considered mutually exclusive in the pop culture imaginary of the US. They were black *and* southern, southern *and* urban.[221]

Thus, Southern blacks are paradoxically both *more Southern*, in that they express, experience, and defend a richly distinctive folk culture, *and* not Southern at all, in official mainstream rhetoric of Southernness. As Watts notes, "But who are Southerners? In common parlance, Southerners often refers to white Southerners--specifically, those white Southerners who proudly identify themselves as such." This chapter discusses the way black hip hoppers have strategically defined place and region, to remember their oppositional status within the Confederacy, Jim Crow South, and New South even as the contemporary South attempts to sanitize its image. For example, clothing line NuSouth reinvigorated images of the Confederate

---

[221] Hornsby xi. "Dough Is What I Got" *Da Drought III* Mixtape. Riche Richardson *Black Masculinity in the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta, 212*. Watts, 5.

battle flag to symbolize black ownership of and in the South. The designers created clothing with the flag colored red, black, and green to ironically symbolize black resistance and the pervasive black presence in the Confederate landscape. Similarly, as Richardson also notes, on the cover of *Put Yo Hood Up*, while the images of Confederate flags are burning in the background, Lil Jon drapes one across his shoulders could be considered a symbolic reclamation.[222]

These artists should be evaluated not only in the context of a vague, disembodied black masculinity, but in the specific locality and identity of the black South. Echoing white articulations of Southern citizenship, black artists often align themselves with the aesthetic of the region. The following chapter discusses the *Southernness* of Hip Hop through its adaptation of a Southern literary and musical aesthetic, as defined by the emphasis on legacies of place and the Southern Gothic.

Following Woodward, Watts reminds us that more than US art in general, Southern art has privileged "the centrality of place in Southern culture." This enduring sense of identifying with the landscape of a historicized region and state specificity pervades not only Southern letters, but music as well. Southerners rhetoric embodies the sense of rootedness, even to the point of articulating a trapped in place. In commenting on the virulent racism of the white southerners during the civil rights movement, Warren calls the Civil War "The Great Alibi" for their horrific behavior, writing that "Even if the Southerner prays to feel different, he may still feel that to change his attitude would be treachery—to that City of the Soul which the historical Confederacy became, to blood spilled in hopeless valor, to the dead fathers, and even to the self. He is trapped in history." The inescapability of place and history shaped southern identity and the art that issued

---

[222] Watts, 3-4.

from southerners.[223]

The use of the place-identified Southern rebel as the real American has particular resonance in our era, in which there has been a resurgence of the viability of country music and the rural white southerner as the American ideal. What has been called the "Redneck Renaissance" describes the ascendance of country in the public space, almost as a parallel cultural backlash to the ascendance of hip hop. Lil Wayne's Bestselling Album of the Year, *Carter III*, in 2008, for example, was answered by Taylor Swift's *Fearless* in 2009. The particular dominance of husband and wife duo, Blake Shelton and Miranda Lambert, both of whom have reworked confederate civil war songs show the continued relevance of the nostalgia for the plantation ideal, agrarian nobility, and a unified past. This place-making that locks the listeners into a sanitized rural past, the good old days without the mess of racial commentary, provides the negative image to hip hop's gritty urbanity. Both views, however, provide musical escape from the tangle of reality.

At Big Spring Jam 2008 in Huntsville, Alabama Shelton yelled out to his audience "It's a crowd full of freakin rednecks man, I can look out there and see. That's why I love it here cause I fit in. It takes a crowd of freakin rednecks to understand why I love something like this." Cheers follow, and a solo fiddler takes the stage. His solo bleeds into a live rendition of Shelton's 2004 cover of a 1989 song by the Marcy Brothers, "Cotton Pickin' Time." The key elements of the song express a sentimental and illogical nostalgia for a past rooted in a southern experience collapsed with a romantic interest that remixes the plantation ideal for our age. As a reinvention of the Southern Agrarian and plantation genres, Shelton sings "in the days of my December/I know I will remember/Sowin' oats at Cotton Pickin' Time...But you don't get too much money/When

---

[223] Watts, 8. Robert Penn Warren, "The Legacy of the Civil War," *The Oxford Book of the American South*, 161.

you got a Tupelo honey/Keepin' you cool in the Mississippi hot sunshine. We've come a long way since then/Now I own that cotton gin/And I bought that mill/Just to make her smile." Similarly, in "Kiss my Country Ass" Shelton sings of "Tearin' down a dirt road/Rebel flag flyin'/Coon dog in the back/Truck bed loaded down with beer/And a cold one in my lap/Earnhart sticker behind my head." As was the case for their emotion driven redemption post- civil war, the southern ideal becomes the American ideal and white southerners without chagrin are able to champion plantation and confederate markers with the guise of opposing ostensibly deracialized urban or otherwise fancy environments. As a Rural and place-identified, country boys mark the territory with allusions to rural landscapes, cotton, rebel flags, NASCAR, and dirt roads. Even narratives not so ostensibly Southern use different devices to reject the grand complications of both modern and postmodern life.

Rappers use southern cityscapes and markers of the South to create simplified personas that tap into the mainstream construction of southern as rough and ready as well. However, we might ask how is the Southern rapper distinct in this identification with place? Rappers notoriously represent their hoods and gang affiliations. Murray rightly asks "Can Jay-Z be realistically disconnected from Brooklyn or Nas from Queens?" arguing that "where these individuals are from is an essential element of who they are and what they project." What Imani Perry calls "mini-nationalism" is not only apparent in Southern rappers drawl and accent (Carter's speech for example often sounds more accented when he isn't rapping), but also in the references that locate them as an insider with specific place markers as referent. Wayne does not only rep Holly Grove, Eagle and Apple Street, and the Seventeenth ward, he also acknowledges the "Zulu Ball, Essence Fest, Jazz Fest, Mardi Gras" are markers of his place. Perhaps in that sense one could argue that the Southern articulation of the cityscape is aware of the block, but is also regional distinctive. The corollary would perhaps be a New Yorker from queens talking about the Macy's Thanksgiving

Day Parade and discussing the regional distinctiveness of the East Coast, rather than just representing the East Coast. While East Coast and West Coast beefs loom large in discussion of place in hip hop, there is little from these rappers articulating a distinct regional sensibility. Calling New Orleans the "Creole cockpit" and promising to serve a pot of "Gangsta gumbo" Carter demonstrates the historical and regional distinction of Louisiana. As the previous chapter noted, like many East Coast and West Coast rappers, Wayne articulates unique awareness of his place within the cityscape. However, unlike these other region's rappers, he also articulates regional affiliation and historical awareness connecting him to other rappers in the South.[224]

Similarly, OutKast's albums continuously shot out East Point "The home of the Bankhead Bounce, Campbellton Road and other city streets."[10] However, like Wayne; the group's articulation of citizenship places them in a regional affiliation with the South as a collective. In Their tribute to Southern affiliation a voice of an airplane captain flying over the city welcomes the listeners to the Atlanta landscape, "We have clear blue skies over Atlanta which by the way is the home of the Atlanta Hawks, the Braves and the Falcons. To the far left you can see the Georgia Dome which by the way still flies the confederate battle flag. Atlanta has been called the new Motown of the South…" Thus, the group acknowledges that the legacy of the Confederacy is alive and well in the South even as they choose to represent themselves as distinctly Southern. Using ironic play, Andre 3000 demonstrates his affiliation with a pop culture marker of (white) Southern identity, Dukes of Hazzard: "Throw up your Daisy Dukes. I'm hazardous to all you Boss Hogs and Rosco Pico people who caboose my locomotive." Additionally, OutKast continues to explicitly situate themselves within the black Southern experience "See, niggas in the South wear gold teeth

---

[224] Forman and Neal, 156. Carter, Best Rapper Alive, Tha Carter II. Carter, , Carter II, *Tha Carter II*.

and gold chains…You might call us country, but we's only Southern."[225]

If the rhetoric of the Confederate States could be summed up in one image, it would be the image of the underdog. The mythology of the black and white South both identify with this rhetoric (albeit for different reasons). The distinct history of the South still resonates in counterpoint to the U.S. national mythology. "That [Southern] history does not include an unbroken experience of invincibility, success, opulence, and innocence…That is for the good and simple reason that, unlike the nation, The South has known defeat and failure, long periods of frustration and poverty." This legacy of being the wounded soldier in an unfinished war of Yankee (for Southern whites) or racist (for Southern blacks) aggression infused the strategies of Southern Rappers. Their lyrics, both white and black, represent citizenship in a beat up, proud, surviving nation often in need of defense. Ironically, post-Civil War both Southern blacks and whites used the rhetoric of the underdog to position themselves as defenders in an on-going war against the South.[226]

Lil Wayne's work in the early 2000s was rife with these images as directly linked to his identification with the South. For example he says, "Chaperone of the South, I got my coast" and "It's Weezy baby, young and from the Dirty South. I'm a boss man, I watch over the South" even though "niggas is scared of the Southern part of America." In these instances the South must be protected. Like the Confederate memorial, these lyrics imagine black southerners as soldiers locked in a war. However, perhaps his most memorable pronouncements of Southern identity as being under attack are in the track *Shooter:*

> So many doubt 'cause I come from the South, but when I open up my mouth, all bullets come out. Bang! Die Bitch nigga die, I hope you bleed a lake. I'ma play x-ray helping

---

[225] Two Dope Boyz, ATLiens; Southernplayalisticadillacmusik

[226] OutKast *Wailin', ATLiens.* OutKast, *West Savannah, Aquemeni.* Woodward, 229.

> y'all see the fake….And to the radio stations, I'm tired of being patient. Stop being rapper racists, region haters, spectators, dictators, behind door dick-takers…But this is Southern face it, if we too simple then y'all don't get the basics.

Admittedly, one could make the argument that the underground/overcomer image is part of the black aesthetic tradition and Hip Hop represents that lineage. However, for the Southern case, in that Southern rappers often claim that "the South got something to say" that is being ignored simply because the artist is representing Southern identity.[227]

The legacy of the Southern Gothic is by itself an intervention against mainstream representations of the South. This rhetorical field rejects or warps notions of the idyllic landscape and the chivalrous southern gentry. These realistic depictions of physical and sexual violence, fantastic horror, exaggeration to the point of distortion, and the treatment of the expressively spiritual as commonplace, are all elements found in Southern Gothic. Rural isolation and the isolation of the poor (compared to the relative proximity of the rich and poor in industrial centers) add a distinctiveness to the Southern aesthetic. Wagner-Martin writes that this isolation led to the "colloquial, even the macabre" that is characteristic of Southern art. These stories often use the shock of the grotesque to eviscerate the myths of southern gents and ladies and acknowledge the social upheaval and mixture roiling beneath the staid images of the plantation. As Shaw writes, "Southerners' shocking representations of sex, violence, religious excess, rural poverty, a degenerate aristocracy, and the legacy of racial hatred undercut traditional romantic images of the South and established regional tropes and stereotypes."[228]

---

[227] Carter, *Believe That, 500 Degreez*; Carter, *Fly Out, Tha Carter II* Carter, *Army Gunz, Like Father Like Son*. Carter, *Tha Carter II*. OutKast, Chonkyfire, *Aquemini*.

[228] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* ed. Robert Allison Beford/St. Martin's Boston 2007) 64. Lil Wayne "Rich as Fuck" *I Am Not a Human Being II.* Wagner-Martin in Hobson, 30. Shaw, Bradley. "Baptizing Boo: Religion in the Cinematic Southern Gothic." *The Mississippi Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2010): 445-476.

For example, In Faulker's short story "Wash," poor, white Wash Jones and his granddaughter squat in a rundown shack on the plantation of former Confederate Colonel Sutpen. After establishing Wash Jones' squalid living conditions the text flashes back to descriptions of Jones' encounters with the Colonel's slaves who have no respect for him. The slaves, in fact, due to their connection to the Colonel's elite status derisively needle Jones about his lack of participation in the war and his obvious poverty. Laughing at Jones' false sense of white privilege, the Sutpen slaves say, "Who him calling us niggers?" The interaction leads Jones to attempt to attack them, "snatching up a stick from the ground while they scattered before him, yet seeming to surround him with all that black laughing, derisive, evasive, inescapable, leaving him panting and impotent and raging." Unable to make sense of this reality, Wash Jones must retreat into his imagination, telling himself that the world is an illusion. He must stitch together unifying narratives to undergird his religious belief in white supremacy. Even after the crushing defeat of war and returning to a defunct plantation, however, Colonel Sutpen's crazed vision of hierarchy prompts him to use Jones' fifteen-year-old daughter for sex and then disregard his new child's mother by saying "too bad you're not a mare. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable." This inhumane disregard ruptures Wash's view of the world, a revelation he cannot stand, and he murders the Colonel, his granddaughter, and great- granddaughter. In the moment of revelation Jones stands "beneath a strange sky, in a strange scene, familiar only as things are familiar in dreams." There is no reconciling the social orders, no way forward, only death.[229]

The very proximity of slaves and masters in the South created a double vision where identical images called up opposite meanings. Sivils, for example writes about the of trees being simultaneously symbolic of commercial agriculture, natural abundance, human connection to

---

[229] William Faulkner, "Wash" in *The Oxford Book of the American South*, 245-246, 244, 250.

spirit world, and racial violence. Similarly, in Faulkner's "Wash" gallant horses are described as "symbols also of admiration and hope; instruments too of despair and grief." As the Gothic genre intervenes against the narrative of southern pastoral bliss, the black Gothic is similarly preoccupied with bloody scenes, the supernatural, and resignation resisted through violence. Although academic segregation prevents these works from being seen as southern or as engaging and a Southern Gothic sensibility are characteristics of many black southern narratives in the twentieth century.[230]

From its earliest manifestations southern black literature treated gruesome horrors, the supernatural presence, and overwhelming despair as part of the everyday experience. Key figures in the Southern Gothic Tradition, gruesome detail of master and slave encounters and an abiding sense of the supernatural permeates slave narratives. The horrors of slave life are often portrayed as issuing from wickedness or demon possession. In *Narrative of a Life of a Slave,* Douglass describes one of his overseers as making the plantation a "field of blood and blasphemy" and a mistress whose "angelic face gave place to that of a demon." Although these narratives can turn hopeful, often the central figure embraces violence and despair as the natural common response to his circumstances. For Douglass, this resignation is only overcome through violent resistance against the farmer to whom he had been rented. Douglass calls this violent episode "a glorious resurrection." In Douglass' narrative manhood is wrested from the oppressor through violence. Douglass' battle with Covey reinvigorates a manhood failing under the burden and lash of slavery.[231]

---

[230] Matthew, Wynn Sivils. "Reading Trees in Southern Literature." *Southern Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2006): 88-102. Faulkner, "Wash," 252.

[231] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* Dover NY 1995) 7, 19. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative* 43.

This mixture of violent episodes, supernatural awareness, and despair bleeds into Southern black secular music throughout the twentieth century. Unlike gospel which spoke of inevitable redemption, bluesmen and women imagined a world where hope did not reign. The inescapable magnitude of oppression prompts this response from "a heart that cannot heal but will not die" Taking the rhetorical aesthetic from the slave experience, the bitter irony that decades after emancipation are considered the most wretched moments of the black experience in the South is reflected in the sonic imprint of southern music. As Powell states, "notions of race, class, social hierarchy, and politics loom over Muddy Waters' licks and Bessie Smith's moans." Rather than being characterized by the institutional and cultural dehumanization of their moment, artists were said to use moanin' as a method for public discourse and communal resistance. Feeing blue is a central notion around which many black authors, musicians, and artists in the U.S. South pivot. Paradoxically, artists spun feelings typically associated with powerlessness into powerful and complex articulations of selfhood. For Andrews "self-empowerment" is the "aesthetic foundation of the blues." Thus, expanding and revising traditional notions of power could be seen as a central theme of Southern music.[232]

Using Lil Wayne's music as a study in the performance of blue feelings the legacy of death, dying, and drug use is clear. Although they are often perceived as insane, suicidal, demonic, or murderous, southern black articulations of masculinity declaration of the inevitability of death can be read as an affirmation rather than negation of the self in relationship to the material conditions of black life. Like other iterations of the Southern gothic, the black body's

---

[232] Jeffrey Stewart 90. Powell, Richard J. "The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism." *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism*, Ed. Richard J. Powell. Washington D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1989, 19. Andrews, Dwight D. "From Black to Blues: Towards a Blues Aesthetic." *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism*, Ed. Richard J. Powell. Washington D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1989, 39.

encounters with death and summoning of death through illicit drug use is as expansion and revision of traditional notions of the empowered and healthy body.[233]

I feel like dying is one such encounter. Unlike many other songs which listeners complain are difficult to understand because of slur, speed or mechanized vocoder, these literal words are clear. Wayne first describes the ecstasies of smoking weed and the literal high with various space metaphors and images typical in "get high" music, "clouds," "moon," "world at my feet," et cetera. The last sentence of the first verse turns from this straightforward description by breaking at the word "lying" that gives the doubles the meaning of the word. So, the last sentence is first understood in part, that Wayne is so high that he feels like lying. After a significant pause, he continues, changing the original meaning of the word. Once the sentence is complete the alternate meaning of lying is revealed--Wayne is so high that he feels like "lying, down in a cigar, roll me up and smoke me 'cause," Linking the verse to the sampled chorus, and doubling the meaning of smoke (to ingest smoke or to kill). By, punning to double the meaning, Wayne produces several texts that overlay each other and point to alternative understandings of the song as a whole. The pause after lying underlines the potential that the song itself could be heard as a lie, indicating the distinction between the created text as art and Wayne as a self that could be understood though it. That the song is not Wayne. Interestingly, "Misunderstood" supports this reading of the text: "y'all thought Lil Wayne was Weezy, but Weezy is Wayne" indicating that Dwayne Carter is the creator of Lil Wayne, not the other way around, even as Lil Wayne (the brand/commodity) is primary in the public eye. This is Chorus "I feel like dying" punctuated by laughter often directly after dyin'. This is a throwback to the rhetoric of blues musicians. Although Wayne famously rapped this song at several concerts, the fact that it is an unreleased single reveals more about the

---

[233] See Ellis *If We Must Die.*

process of creation than the critics reception indicate. The increased sense of fragmented literalness is characteristic of freestyle rap that privileges finding the end rhyme and surprise rather than unraveling a coherent scene.

Carter specifically engages a revised southern modernism, fusing a black southern gothic with a menagerie of ruined (or inverted or slanted) pastoral images. The use of the pastoral or everyday image is markedly different from other region's rappers. It's as if the shadow of the farm lingers over southern rap even though rappers call urban areas home. For example, in "Ova Here Hustlin" Wayne raps, "Adams apple meet banana clip." Of course the direct meaning of this double synecdoche is the threat that Wayne will kill someone by shooting him in the throat. However, nestled in the phrase is the whimsical, made-for-Sesame Street, "apple meet banana." "It aint my birthday, but I got my name on the cake" In this line Wayne reverses the wholesome image of the birthday cake. He projects his name into the celebratory scene, hijacking the party. Of course, cake is also slang for money or cocaine. So, he creates the double vision where the celebratory moment is overshadowed with the possibility of an illicit transaction. In another song from *Like Father, Like Son* Wayne similarly uses wholesome or pure images in close proximity with potentially corrupt ones, saying "stay strapped and laced like girls socks. Stay dapped and draped like a birthday cake." Although, these images do not accord exactly with the content of the anti-pastoral, they accord with the theme of intersecting purity and corruption, simplicity and complication.[234]

For black rhetoricians the symbols of natural rurality, the landscape of the plantation and the pastoral landscape have a political resonance reminding listeners of the Malcolm X's rhetoric

---

[234] "Stuntin like my daddy" *Like Father Like Son.* "Like Father Like Son" *Like Father Like Son.*

and the rhetoric of the Black Arts movement. According to Epps, "Malcolm X compressed history into a single time frame. Negro history was cyclical, always returning to the same starting point…the scenario always took place on the plantation."[235] Although Wayne makes little direct reference to slavery or black oppression. He uses the narrative schemes of Southern Gothic writers to imagine a world where dark powers hold court.

Wayne represents a hood that is rendered with the fantastic ethos of a horror film, "straight out the slaughterhouse straight out the dragon's mouth. Now that's cold bleed, I mean cold blooded. And I'm so Southern that's why my leather so soft." What is said of Southern writers and the space they represent sounds reminiscent of hip hop scholars. Their "so-called civilization" is governed by a "bedrock of meanness" where "the prize goes to the utterly inhumane."[236]

Perhaps one caveat is that with the voice of the black South, the experience of poverty, despair, and the bleak is (to borrow from Hughes) *not* without laughter. Whereas, the shifts in rhetorical strategies in the Southern gothic of white writers "is for the effect of devastation, never comedy." I would argue that is this is a pivotal distinction, marking the fundamentally different relationship of white and blacks to the Confederacy and its "Lost Cause" rhetoric. Even though "the dirty South is straight Vietnam," the echo of laughter is often interspersed with the exaggerated depictions of stylized violence and the presence of God and Devil. All the artists walk through the hell with the symbolic swag of one familiar with evil: "Yeah it's hot down here take a walk with Satan yeah"; "No my heart don't pump no Koolaid jump, and you'll get too sprayed…The devil up in yo grill and you still don't even know'em. Show'em, who's the ok, like

---

[235] Epps, *Notes from the Lectures at Harvard 1968*, 77

[236] Carter, Leather So Soft, *Like Father,Like Son*. Hobson 51-52.

collard greens and hoe cakes"; and "A mill for the moment lord knows I'm gonna die. And when I get to hell lord knows I'm gonna fry. (Ha ha)." In the song "Like Father, Like Son" Lil Wayne raps about being mentored by Bryan Williams, "He was my preacher, so I was like fuck the reverend. My mother Cita she said that I was wit the devil." Later in the same song he says, "I do believe the money's cursed me. So, I pray to God that the devil don't murk me." Here Lil Wayne seems to be rejecting religion in favor of the worldly pleasures that "the devil" can offer, presumably money and fame. This rejection of religion or selling one's soul for fame is a standard figure in gothic and blues rhetoric. Bluesman Robert Johnson for example was said to have met the devil at the crossroads to trade his soul for guitar skills. In addition to connecting to a blues aesthetic, by using this figure, Wayne questions the efficacy of organized religion in twenty first century urban centers. In line with Southern spirituality, however, he ironically articulates a faith-based rejection of religion. He rejects the reverend for the preacher, who may be the devil, and so must pray to God for deliverance.[237]

Recent music videos by Lil Wayne have intensified this representation of the Gothic and the supernatural. Lil Wayne's video "Love Me" featuring Drake and Future contains the full catalogue of gothic imagery. While there is a graphic lyrical display of degradation of women[238], at the same time the song's hook "long as my bitches love me," indicating that these same women

---

[237] Hobson 52. Carter, *Bloodline*, *500 Degreez.* Carter, "Fireman," Tha Carter II; OutKast, *Southernplaya*; Jenkins, "I Love It," *The Inspiration.* Contrary to the conspiracy theorist's suggestion that Wayne is a Satanist, God shows up in his rhetoric and iconography almost as frequently as the devil. However, the characterization of evil is much more interesting, nuanced and tangible. Consider, for example, quick zingers like "Hotter than the Devil, Nigga, hell yeah" from "Gonorrhea" I Am Not a Human Being. "Sometimes you gotta fight the devil with a demon" "Abortion" *Tha Carter IV.*

[238] Among the many examples, Wayne blithely raps, "baby just make me cum, then don't make a sound;" "All she eat is dick, she's on a strict diet;" and "I love all my bitches, but it's like soon as I cum, I come too my senses."

are the saving grace for a baller. The aggressive, even abusive, language he directs at the women fits into the gothic schema as it consistently reveals the lack humanity accorded to women who have been degraded to the status of bitches. Though this could be read as garden variety hip hop misogyny, Wayne makes a distinction between a ho and a lady, remixing the southern image of womanhood, proper southern belle worthy of protection versus loose women meant to be used for sex, "These hoes got pussies like craters, can't treat these hoes like ladies." These degraded women pose submissively lying on their backs, crawling, and in various states of bondage. In segments of the video these women transform partially into animals, literally taking on their physical characteristics. In one segment of the video several of them crawl around beneath Wayne's bed that has been half-submerged in water, coiling their bodies around the bedposts and later intertwining their limbs with each other and Wayne like a pile of snakes. This snake imagery continues as Future walks through a dark corridor of caged women flicking their serpentine tongues and lizard-like tails. "Bitches" are imagined as beautiful and terrible creatures who must be dominated to minimize their danger and power. In other scenes women are seen momentarily licking various instruments of violence, a bullet, straight razor, whip, and an industrial chain.

The video also alludes to demon possession and the presence of evil in this realm. Early in the song Wayne raps, "These hoes love me like Satan." The phrase is ambiguous, meaning that hoes love Satan or that Satan loves Lil Wayne. However, the screen flickers briefly overlaying a red tinted image of Wayne with horns protruding from his forehead, aligning himself with the devil in his dominion over wretched women. This presence of evil is heightened with iconic images of the grotesque, darkness and decay in the two scenes where computer generated roaches skitter across Lil Wayne's forehead. Like other videos and imagery where he has used the blood motif, as a reference to his power and to his gang affiliation there is copious blood imagery here.

In a scene that could only have been created to get Illuminati conspiracy theorists in an uproar, women dressed in white body suits crawl to a tub of blood and smear themselves, each other, the floor, and walls.

In addition to the thematic sensibility, Wayne in particular has increasingly shifted figuratively in ways that symbolically align him with resistant modes of being. Like his parodist persona, his increasing use of pun disrupts and distorts passive consumption. Like signifying, the pun is particularly useful to conversations of multiple manifestations of identity and the possibility. I contend that the pun, like ruptures in the social fabric exposed by Southern Gothic writers, is the literary moment of syntactical rupture and performs a stylistic resistance to mainstream constructions of truth and history. The pun has embedded within it the possibility for resistance. Consider Kreyling's discussion of creative resistance in Wright, Ellison, and Andrews, "Whereas Wright's race feeling is visceral, Andrews vacillates between head and gut. Whereas Ellison defends a border between protest and literature, Andrews writes in a liminalzone where literary systems are the means (and one of the ends) of protest."[239] If we agree with Kreyling that literary systems can be protest. Then, Wayne's insistence on rapping against narrative cohesion and increasing insertion of pun is part of the protest. While naturally I'm not arguing that all deconstruction is resistance (just because you burn buildings down doesn't mean you're a revolutionary), but I am arguing that resistance requires conceiving deconstruction. I define systemic deconstruction as an energetic revealing of the alternative possibility of a thing's meaning.

Like the Gothic's revealing of alternative possibilities of the southland and its people, pun bears within the internal logic of deconstruction. To understand pun as pun, one word must

---

[239] Kreyling, 90.

operate as two or a part of a word must carry on multiple functions. Thus, pun is parody at the level of the word. Deconstruction, parody, and I argue the pun force meaning into relational space rather than allowing the myth of the separation to persist. This is the same relational revelation created in Faulkner's "Wash." In "Wash" the illusion of humanity and mutuality is ruptured; in Wayne's use of pun the singular image is doubled disrupting the linear flow of the rhyme. The reliance on pun reminds listeners of the usefulness of call and response. The linguistic strategy is not just there to keep the audience awake; it's part of bringing a shared reality into being. Linguists agree that all languages have particular discourse and rhetorical patterns. All languages are rule-governed, they reflect systematic, predictable patterns. Language reflects cultural and social conventions. In the pun we see the collapse of artistry and efficiency, layering, doubling, past and present referent simultaneously recalled. Pun highlights the fungibility of the referent, the looseness of the text and to the terror of the southern aesthetic that a marker (like markers of social status) can stand for its opposite, something similar, or nothing at all.

Art and music that seems resigned to pure description of behaving badly without morals or giving consumers a clear way out, art that stops trying to elevate could be considered tragic, however the giving into the representation should not be placed in cross hairs in lieu of the trauma itself. The body that yearns for freedom and life and fails and is told that none exists is not obligated to deny its own fatigue, to reveal its vulnerable hope. The reality that the spirit can be broken--this is not the strange incomprehensible moment. What we might call The Beloved Moment. It is the sweetest of spirits that senses what inevitable monstrosity it must become to endure a rotten world. That's what gangsta rap has in common with the Southern Gothic. It looks into and expresses and performs the rotten spirit of men and women. This performance of the other (though rappers are seen as revealing themselves rather that performing otherness)…at the same time it reminds us willing and wanting to banish it, "Look Away! Look Away!" That these

same monsters have fragments of heroism, loyalty, and purpose, though they were born into a rotten pit. They don't rise majestically above their bigotry or abuse. They turn towards it, spit at it, lift it up to reveal it to others, then to the watcher's horror as they try to burn the stink of it off of them and their families.

Chapter 6 Citizen Wayne

"Americans hate that I'm American" Lil Wayne "I Am Not a Human Being"

Every Fourth of July, the symbols and markers of United States national affiliation and citizenship are carted out from basements and closets, dusted off, and reinvigorated for a new generation. Up until very recently, black children were (still are in some cases) compelled by their teachers to claim these historical markers of U.S. identity as their own. Without complication or irony they learned, "this land is my land," and sang "sweet land of liberty." Perhaps, some child sitting in the back of a dusty yellow flatbed saw a Confederate flag on the license plate of the car behind of her and wondered what strange country it represented. "That's a Southern flag," she was told. "That's an American flag." The last chapter discussed the ways that southernness is complicated by blackness and masculinity. Maintaining the focus on the US south, this chapter analyzes the lyrics and symbols of Southern Hip Hop artists, Lil Wayne, OutKast and Jeezy and their construction and negotiation of U.S. citizenship, specifically interrogating how these artistic signs disrupt, replicate, and complicate the conventional representation.

Though black citizenship was legally sanctioned by the United States, (by a constitutional amendment, which is both mythical and literal symbol of U.S. affiliation and incorporation) historical and artistic memory both reveal that the incorporation of blacks into the U.S. collective would be more complicated. In *Black is a Country*, Nikhil Singh re-contextualizes the supermen of black intellectual, political, and cultural history (Frederick Douglass, King, DuBois, Wright, Ellison, Hughes, Black Panther Party) as producing a body of rhetoric that hinged importantly (most importantly, for Singh) on ambivalence towards U.S. national mythology. He writes, "One thing is certain: the long civil rights era did not lead to black assimilation into the U.S. nation-state, but to a more

complex dynamic of differential inclusion."[1] Blacks' access to citizenship rights and their *differential inclusion* in the U.S. has often been described in terms of betrayal, fraud, and a bold-faced lies.[240]

In *Emancipation Betrayed*, Eric Foner outlines the history of that betrayal. While the overwhelming majority of blacks in the U.S. were enslaved by the late 1700, the first naturalization act confirmed that only free whites had access to U.S. citizenship. The subsequent treatment of blacks in the U.S. courts demonstrated that while citizenship was legally abridged, citizenship in practice is abstract; rights must continually be pinned down, case by case. The history of black resistance exemplifies the persistent hammering down of dissent required to circumscribe the lives of a conscious and intellectually active people. Everyday practice and court cases confirmed the status of enslaved blacks as property and freed blacks as a foreign and unincorporated element in the U.S. nation state. Culminating, perhaps most poignantly, in the Dred Scot decision, again and again, the federal legal apparatuses dictated "that the United States was a political community of whites, and that no black person could be a citizen."[241]

However, with the exigencies of the Civil War and black resistance to their enslavement, legal citizenship for newly freed blacks became inevitable. Black participation in the Union war effort and the literal and metaphoric image of the black soldier as an American would never again return to the community without the power to change the political landscape. Foner writes, "130 former Union soldiers served in political office after the Civil War." Black power brokers in the South often were afforded limited

---

[240] *Black is a Country*, Nikhil Singh, 52

[241] Foner 25

and transitory influence, but there is no question that much of their rhetorical power and access to white support centered on (as it had in the past with Wheatley, Washington and Douglass) their ability to advocate for black equality on the basis of black *Americanness*. Often this reclaimed U.S. identity used the markers that were historically considered symbols of white U.S. citizenship (constitution, forefathers, declaration of independence, stars and stripes), reminding racist whites that equality was the end goal of citizenship. It was not merely a rhetorical ideal, but it must relate to everyday living conditions. "In the words of James Baldwin via Richard Rorty, this is the work of "achieving" our country. Rorty writes of a national pride that induces us to act on a vision of our country and the possibility that we may perfect it. This kind of pride encourages us to think of our citizenship "as an opportunity for action."[242]

The combination of the practical and rhetoric citizenship was felt keenly by both whites and blacks in the U.S. South. For the first time in the history of the U.S., the practical interests and powers of federal governmental resources were aligned with that of enslaved. The black South responded in kind. An anecdote from Paul Ortiz's work on the black Florida's resistance to violence demonstrates the power and upheaval of this irony: "newly liberated African Americans rushed to the aid of the beleaguered troopers and threw up a barricade of cotton bales on the outskirts of town." (5). *A barricade of cotton bales!* The irony of the symbol is startling. Freedom was enacted as a confiscation of property--firstly blacks taking literal ownership of themselves, then ownership of the products they'd produced. Commodities were turned doubly against their former owners.The children of the formerly enslaved would continue to inscribe African Americans onto the historical

---

[242] Foner 54. Griffin *Daedelus*, 134

memory and landscape of understandings of citizenship in the U.S. As "African Americans laid claim to equal citizenship by fashioning a historical past that emphasized black service to the republic." The memory of the participation in the Union effort and the intermingled triumph and trauma of Civil War and Reconstruction was woven in to the folk memory through the testimonial culture of triumph and tribulation. However, this relationship to the U.S. was never one of uncritical adoption. Even as black people took ownership of U.S. national identity, rhetoric, and symbol, they did so to encourage the federal government to treat them fairly. In tandem with direct political strivings, black people's art and music reflected their condition.[243]

Discussing the ways that Hip Hop artists use images that are generally associated with white America by no means exhausts the ways in which hip hop artists represent their identity. In fact is could be argued that when artists locate themselves within or relate to a space the overwhelming emphasis is on the intensely local: the block, building, or set. Gilroy notes that "today, we are told that the boys, and the girls, are from the 'hood—not from the race, and certainly not from the nation." While I would agree that representing a hood is one of the least common denominators of Hip Hop's identity politics, often rappers do simultaneously represent their complicated relationship to their nation, (often because of their race, class, or both). As Lil Wayne says, "You wonder why black people still voting, 'cause your president's still chokin'" (Carter, *Tie My Hands,Carter III*). This blackness is colossal; both incorporating what was formerly for whites only and rejecting or Signifyin on traditional markers of U.S. citizenship. The "ME," "WE" and "US" of black artists rarely expands to include the U.S. in general.

---

[243] Ortiz, 94, 87.

Similarly, the "YOU" is constantly shifting and contextualized. Rather than evading racial difference, race becomes increasingly significant than ever in these articulations of citizen outsider. This nuanced relationship is often demonstrated in outright critique or ironic Signifyin.[244]

Since its explosion in the 1970s,(as the artistic mouthpiece of Black Power) the Black Arts Movement's tradition of using spoken rhymes and black speech to directly critique the U.S. status quo has been ubiquitous in the black music and poetry. For example, Amiri Baraka's poem "Dope" exposes, without hesitation, his raw critique of the Unites States' political legacy. Baraka, in a shifting cadence, describes the folly of trusting the promises issued to by American presidents and politicians, based on their spotty track record of integrity. In an explosive crescendo he says, "Nixon lied. Haldeman lied. Dean lied. Hoover lied, Hoover sucked too, but Jimmy don't. Jimmy wouldn't. Jimmy aint lying, must be the devil…" His technique of turning from forthright truth telling to bitter irony to represent the nation's ills is echoed in the shape shifting rhetorical style of Southern Hip Hop artists.

In his song "dedicated to the president of the United States of America," Lil Wayne demonstrates a similar critique outlining the specific suffering of black people in New Orleans during the Hurricane Katrina disaster and the inadequate, racist, and oppressive practices of journalists and police. His first verse builds to culminate with, "So what happened to the levees, why wasn't they steady? Why wasn't they able to control this? I know some folk that live by the levee that keep on telling me they heard the explosions. Same shit happened back in Hurricane Betsy 1965; I ain't too young to know this. That was

---

[244] Forman and Neal, 89.

President Johnson but now it's president (Georgia) Bush."[245] This sort of outright unmediated critique of governmental and police discrimination is ever present in Southern Hip Hop. However, this song is a particularly interesting case because although it gained significant popularity, it was somewhat hidden among Lil Wayne's unreleased mixtapes. This is perhaps due to the more outright racialized content or its use of a sample of Ray Charles' *Georgia.* Also, Wayne's attack of U.S. practices is specifically directed at tangible grievances. In that way, the song can be seen similarly to the petition and pamphlet. He asks the government to be held accountable to all of its citizens, and recognizes the historical barriers to that accountability.

A more popular equivalent of this type of direct critique is seen on Jeezy's album, *The Recession*. Jeezy's entire CD is grounded in a sub textual critique of the inadequate response of the U.S. federal government to black poverty. However, the song *Crazy World* foregrounds this critique, fingering George Bush as the responsible party. In a chorus that begins, "Goddamn another trap. I think Bush's trying to punish us. Send a little message out to each and every one of us. Real G shit well that's really unheard of when you get more time for selling dope than murder." This critique demonstrates the Southern artist's awareness of unfair treatment and injustice. Jeezy is describing a *crazy world* where things are not as they should be—where a president is not fulfilling his duty to his constituency. Again, this echoes earlier forms of black Southern resistance that petitioned the government for responsive governance that took seriously the concerns of black citizens.

However, this articulated desire to be considered and protected as part of the body

---

[245] Carter, *Georgia Bush, Dedication II* Mixtape.

politic is not ever a wholesale acceptance of the U.S. as a collective. Later on perhaps one of Jeezy's most popular tracks, he shots out the "first Black president" nearly six months before Barack Obama's election, saying, "My President is Black….first Black president--win, lose, or draw" months before the election, in song that ends, "shots out to Jackie Robinson. Booker T. Washington, homie. Oh y'all aint think I knew that shit. Sidney Portier, what they do? Ha ha" (Jenkins, *My President is Black).* These references place Jeezy both inside and outside of the traditional articulation of U.S. citizenship. Jeezy claims that regardless of the national favorite his president will be Barack Obama. His ending underscores this citizenship within a black American collective. This citizenship is not merely separatist or a subset of U.S. identity.

Consistent with the Black aesthetic tradition of signifyin', Southern artists also represent black lyrical power by inverting and repositioning U.S. cultural references, previously raced for whites only. The reference no longer signifies what it might for white citizens once it has been taken through the Black experience. Signifyin' has alternately been called, "revers[ing] the power of dominant culture."[246] This requires a mind that rejects the conventional reference to reveal a new, perhaps unrelated truth. As Illo says of Malcolm X, "tropes and schemes are departures from literal meaning…like revolutionism, destroy[ing] conventional definitions to restore wholeness and reality." Thus, a symbolic marker of white citizenship becomes recoded. Krims sees the same Signifyin in Ice Cube, defining it to be "borrowing, 'inflecting and inverting' signs of the (Eurocentric) culture" to establish a "specific ethnicity."With the acrobatic linguistic

---

[246] Alim, "Hip Hop Nation Language" 395.

innovation artists resist to traditional uses of the national symbols of the United States.[247]

Contrary to the many critics who claim that Southern rap is not a space of intellectual invention or political resistance, this use of black language "is not only a Black expressive cultural phenomenon; it is at the same time, a resisting discourse, a set of communicative practices that constitute a text of resistance against White America's racism and its Eurocentric cultural dominance." Arguably, what are most interesting about Hip Hop are the indirect, sly puns and innovative uses of language to address social ills and issues. Thus, the same strategies discussed in chapter two to demonstrate cultural literacy and social status are used to specifically to do the work of affirming national affiliation and make claims about citizenship. The significant difference is that the former use of Signifyin creates an informal language community perhaps highlighting grievances while the latter expressed here are more specifically targeted at official symbols of public citizenship. Wayne, Jeezy, and OutKast all use these signifyin' techniques to demonstrate their relationship to the United States and its institutions (here, represented by schools, courts, and police). Highlighting governmental organizations provides listeners with an alternative reading of the State. Countless examples exist of signifyin' used to challenge the political status quo. Among the practices of black Floridians to redefine citizenship, Ortiz writes that they "ingeniously recast job discrimination as a political question…weld[ing] the language of equal citizenship to the discourse of wartime service."[248]

Similarly, Wayne's and OutKast's lyrics about the education system as a state apparatus function to question the ability of the U.S. public education system to promote

---

[247] Smith, 167. Krims, 95.
[248] Ortiz, 151.

equality and excellence for its black students. In *Call of the Wild,* Andre 3000 from OutKast says:

> I'm making 300 on my SAT and I am equal. To graduate is really becomin a very stressful journey. I feel like a steering wheel, for them is tryin to turn me into a hate monger, and I'm wishin and I wonder, 'Damn, will I graduate before I hit the summer? I think not, Officer Friendly tryin to dig up in me.

Thus, like their Southern antecedents, OutKast joins together police harassment and educational disparity, highlighting the way that it reflects civic inequality, and latent racism in institutional practices in the public school system. With an unfriendly officer friendly and lack of equal access to the educational resources, the likelihood of academic success looks bleak.[249]

Wayne's relationship to the U.S. public education is on the surface seems merely to reiterate the amoral money-seeking behavior for which Hip Hop is generally maligned. He says, "Used to make a 1000 dollars every time I play hooky. Dwayne Carter absent keep looking. I'm present on the block." The juxtaposition of absence in school and presence in a more economically lucrative enterprise seems anti-intellectual at best. Here, the explicit reference may be to be drug dealing; however, the underlying message is nonetheless relevant. The fact that public schools have failed to educate black men adequately is irrefutable. Moreover, Wayne himself was an exceptional student before he left school to pursue a rap career. However, the real payoff of the verse comes directly after the aforementioned line, "I gotta bring the hood back after Katrina, Weezy F Baby, now the F is for FEMA." Wayne's return to FEMA and the Katrina disaster reminds listeners of the dangers of depending on public institutions for livelihood, especially as a

---

[249] *OutKast, Southernplaya*

member of a historically oppressed group in the U.S.[250]

Hip Hop's articulation of oppressive relationship to the courts and police is so prevalent in the music that Butler argues Hip Hop artists have developed a coherent theory of justice that could be used to make the criminal punishment system in the U.S. more humane. One of the ways artists do this is by highlighting the contradictions within the punishment system. OutKast demonstrates the ironic intersection of the police's brutal use of force and the criminalization of black behavior. "While we ranting and raving bout gats, nigga they made them gats. They got some shit that'll blow out our backs from where they stay at." This same sentiment that the scales of justice are consistently unbalanced is seen in the Wayne's and Jeezy's work, "I really ain't buying all this bullshit they selling me, when the government throwing more curves than the letter C. I said the letter C. I guess that's for *correctional*. They try to box me in, sit me still like a vegetable" and "I'm trying to be polite, but you bitches in my hair like the fuckin po-*lice.*"[251] In both instances the artists extend the length of the original metaphor to pun or play with the work itself, giving the phrase an additional layer of meaning. Their work also centers the use of definitions and redefinitions to reveal circumstances of black life.

Additionally, artists often question the legitimacy of the United State's position as a military superpower. Even though these artists were specifically chosen to represent what critics call the un-political stream of popular rap, because they do not as frequently infuse their lyrics with these references. However, they do speak out about war and their citizenship in a way that locates them within the U.S. context. David Banner's spoken

---

[250] Feel Me" *Tha Carter II*

[251] OutKast, "Babylon." Jenkins, *Crazy World.* Carter, *Gossip, Tha Carter III.*

word interlude provides a example that demonstrates the call to white and black Americans to take responsibility for the government's actions:

> African American, but Africa she ain't our home. Man listen, they look at us as cotton pickers. They might as well, 'cause we love to call ourselves, Niggas. And George Bush is a part of a bigger problem. Old America loves hate; man they'll never stop it. And every rapper that I see has a "key," but they don't have the key to be free.[252]

In contrast, Jeezy layers references to the war with Hip Hop references, marking the irony that Black citizens have spoken about since the Black participation in the American Revolution. "'Be all you can be.' Now don't that sound like some dumb shit? When they die over crude oil that's black as my nigga, Boo, it's really a Desert Storm. That's word to my nigga Clue."[253]

Like OutKast and Pastor Troy, Jeezy's the use of lyrical Signifyin to critique the U.S. are accompanied by his disruption of the material iconography of the U.S., the flag. This demonstrates visually what Black artists of dissent articulate--that historical iconography has a different use and signification when placed in the context of the black experience. Pastor Troy's album cover interprets the former stars of the flag as stylized bull's-eye targets and the red stripes become figured as clips with bullets protruding. Both Jeezy and OutKast, on the other hand, use black and white (or black and grey/silver) interpretations of the star spangled banner, reminding viewers that the historical icons of the U.S. are not inviolable, and by extension neither are its practices. Interestingly, the artists do not reject the U.S. flag as an icon, but reclaim it in its adapted version. Thus, their use becomes an appropriate symbol for the citizen outsider.

---

[252] Banner, *Freedom, The Greatest Story Ever Told*

[253] Jenkins, *My President is Black.*

This chapter's discussion of the historical disconnect between black and American is one that has been reinvigorated over time through the most quintessential symbols of American democracy—the presidency and wide scale presidential actions. Throughout the 1960s non-violent protests were criminalized and riots were hoisted as an inevitable outcome of black organization. This framing of the black urban image as anti-American was continually reinforced well past the sixties through presidential rhetoric that trickled down to popular culture and sentiment. The success of this framing was tested again and again in the campaigns of Nixon, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. Particularly vital in the identity formation of the hip hop generationers was Reagan's campaign. Many scholars describe the presidential policies of evisceration and occupation of the inner cities that occurred under his watch. Equally important, however, was the president's production of the inner city image. The first mainstream images of black crack dealers in inner city ghettoes, for example, were propagated not by early hip hoppers, but by Reagan's media campaign launched in support of his supposed war on drugs. Locating black men inside the inner city and outside of the rhetorical formation of American law and order. This chapter argues that Black identities in the hip hop generation can be illuminated in part by interrogating them within the context of presidential campaign rhetoric and postures towards race. Hip hop era identities have been uniquely marked by Reagan's revision and mainstreaming of the image of black urban youth as drug and gang affiliated. The shift toward the coded language of states' rights and law and order depoliticized resistance and protest against racial oppression. As Kennedy notes, "what coded language seeks to obscure, after all, is the lingering presence of racial

prejudice."[254]

The last four years have revealed heightened racism and unbridled distain for black masculinity as a political category. The marching, buttoned up masculinity and placards of the civil rights era, where a black rhetorical and political stance could be demonstrated by a black man's hoisted sign simply reminding America that "I am a MAN," has given way to Lil Wayne's declaration that "I am not a human being." These reversals seem to confirm that Obama truly was herald, if not to a post-racial era, to an era of post-blackness—a period when blackness cease to bear significant meaning as a marker of identification. According to definers of post-blackness, we can no longer assume anything of blackness. For example, *Who's Afraid of Post Blackness*, begins with an anecdote about older black men clucking nervously and disappointedly over Touré's decision to go sky diving and his defiance of what Dyson calls, "racial policing." The problem with the post-black narrative, and any one that seeks to hold to blackness as a meaningful category AND seeks to eradicate all essentialist and definitive notions of blackness is very persistence of black masculinity as a recognizable and fairly static category in mainstream culture. For all the "identity expansion" of post-blackness Wayne's declaration, "We knew a black president wouldn't change shit," is both entirely true and entirely false. The core premise of post-blackness that there are a million ways to perform blackness doesn't change the fact that each one of these ways operates in a complex negotiations with oppressive racist power structures. This new era of blackness in many ways has more in common with blackness as a political category than it lets on, particularly in the conception of blackness as a flexible and dynamic marker of being that

---

[254] Rebecca Walker, Streams, 126. Attali, *Noise*, 6. The New Jim Crow, 49. Kennedy , 135.

resists being pinned down. It's not the most salient point to aim to definitively point out how black people increasingly and defiantly perform identity in ways that are not historically expected. The more important point for me is that these post-black performances identity are funneled through a cultural machine that reads blackness in historical terms. Although many contend that President Obama represented post-blackness, the same cadre of writers often acknowledge the impossibility of his success if he had performed a blackness that threatened white gender roles. As Touré notes, even in an era he deems post-black "the black candidate must also allay subliminal associations to those Black men by whom whites feel physically threatened." The irony of post-black rhetoric is that Obama could not even be passionate and risk seeming like an angry black man in an America that had deemed non-violent civil rights leaders as imminent threats to white safety. In a nation where black teens are murdered with impunity, what black man is non-threatening? When Obama could no longer easily be speculated to be a non-citizen or a radical terrorist, right wing pundits lambasted him for being "too cool" to lead, repeating over and over his connection to Jay-Z as indictment of his character. They also relied on standby denigrations of black men in power. Unfounded criticism about Obama's "arrogance" recalled and remixed stereotypes of the "Uppity Negro" for the twenty first century.

The unreality of constructions of post-blackness is that a core premise that there are a million ways to be black neglects the indisputable fact that white racist structures in the US require that blacks still perform a non-threatening (not necessarily non-violent) blackness to be successful. There's a logic problem with a theory of identity that wants to acknowledge the persistence of confining material and social conditions of black people *and* says black people's performance of identity can encompass the cosmos. As Touré

admits as a successful post-black politician must also proudly evince black personality tropes.[255]

The hip hop generation more than any that has come before was subject to racist policies, actions, and rhetoric that were obscure and subtle. This retreat of racism further into subtlety, code, and class has influenced a creative response that at times seems ineffectual and ambivalent in addressing racial issues even as black artists identify as black and appeal to a black aesthetic.

Similarly the increasing subtlety of racism necessitated that Obama's assent to identifying as black as opposed to mixed race, while at the same time downplaying the existence of racist opposition. As Kennedy notes, "He is deeply hesitant to claim that a criticism of him is in any way racially discriminatory. He is keenly attentive to the reality that racial discrimination is often hard to identify clearly and that the very effort to make the identification is often politically costly." This means that blacks in the Hip Hop era and beyond increasingly face the challenge that racial kinship itself is seen as passé and racist. Like racism, that kinship must be expressed in code. Obama's persistent disavowal of race as a factor in his policy agenda and his own overt political rhetoric demonstrates as much. As the Hip Hop generation came of age, perhaps its most visible political moment of black masculinity, the Million Man March ushered in a new era of such contradiction. According to Hopkinson and Moore "the Million Man March launched a new front in black politics in which black battles are waged in the realm of perception," in what they

---

[255] Toure, Who's Afraid, 186. Toure's own examples of persistent blackness include the soul-killing "mind virus of Black inferiority," 90; black people's enduring legacy of code-switching (which he calls "modulating"), 10; and the black communal response to individual suffering, 142.

call a political moment that favors "symbolism over spoils." This burgeoning sensibility that traded symbols of progress for spoils culminated in the election of a black president from whom blacks could expect few spoils. "Obama is always careful to offer his black constituents signals that he identifies with them and seeks to advance their interests even if he cannot deliver benefits immediately or in a race-specific fashion. In other words, if nothing else, Obama always offers fellow blacks psychic satisfaction." This psychic satisfaction turned to keen disappointment to many blacks whose doubts were realized in Wayne's line that "a black president wouldn't change shit." Post-blackness also doesn't account for the difference of black masculinity. There is not the same Mariah Carey effect, described by Dyson that "leads to the ideal of the pan-ethnic, omni-racial artist, an exotic fantasy whose energy derives from an implicit denial of the inherent value of simply being black." Lil Wayne's image has seemed to shift in concert with the rhetorical momentum in American popular and political culture towards the post-racial. While continuing to maintain his hood authenticity he performs an ahistoricized rhetoric of mixture often without the discourse of origins and that discourse's concomitant material reality. This shift has dramatically increased in the Obama years, specifically as his style trends toward the costume and in his articulation of himself as not human.[256]

As Richardson aptly notes, among Malcolm X's many transformations he had to restyle himself as dignified and cosmopolitan using dress. X's remarks on this shift in dress as part of removing the shame of what he perceived to be black rural ignorance and the flashiness he perceived to be associated with black urbanites. According to Richardson,

---

[256] Randall Kennedy, *The Persistence of the Color Line*, (New York:Vintage, 2012) 232. Kennedy's remarks about Obama's selection of black in lieu of mixed race are on page 66. Deconstructing Tyrone 38.

his conservative dress "was fundamental to shaping Malcolm X into the authoritative, charismatic leader that he became."[2] Higginbotham's "Politics of Respectability" have been long seen in multiple arenas of black life as they instrumentalize their dress and mannerisms to associate themselves with the power afforded to middle class whites. As Jay-Z famously rapped "I don't wear jerseys. I'm thirty-plus. Give me a crisp pair of jeans, nigga, button ups," and "Throwbacks. I threw 'em back, remember those, button ups?" In these lyrics and in his public presentation Jay-Z went the way of mainstream respectability and the upgrade of high fashion, going so far as to deride other rappers for not following suit.[257]

However, for this respectability politics to work for black bodies they must be perceived as fully committed to the performance of genteel and middle class values and representation, also rejecting racial associations with the black underclass. For urban black southerners, this performance proved particularly difficult in the hip hop era because even as urban areas remained intensely segregated, the end of legal segregation drew black elite middle class models further from urban blight. The sanitized popular images of blacks in the 80s forwarded assimilationist notions of respectability and dress. While the explosion of hip hop culture challenged these often confining notions of style, images of hood life also played into existing stereotypes of urban youth as violent, unkempt, and brutish. Even when distinguishing themselves from other hood inhabitants with ostentatious jewelry and cars, I argue the hood hierarchies separating the haves and have-nots was not distinct enough to mark them off as unique. Race still obscured subjectivity. The performance as

---

[257] Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap*145. Richardson, *Black Masculinity*, 162. "What More Can I Say?" *The Black Album* and "Reminder" *Blueprint III.*

raced urban bodies subjected them to suspicion. Thus, black men in the hip hop era urban south found themselves without pathways to authentic performances of racial difference. They were already scripted as violent and marked for imprisonment or death. Much of the discourse around post-raciality and calls for a post hip hop imagination of black masculinity hinges on being thusly marked. Rather than rejecting hip hop and the images of street life, Lil Wayne's shift in the body performance, tattooing, and costuming revises and broadens mainstream avenues for self-determination in hip hop.

In 2006 Wayne's "Stuntin Like My Daddy" he debuted his first revisions of body performance. He was no longer in the uniform of a seventeenth ward soldier. Still wearing t- shirts, fitted caps, and extra baggy jeans, Wayne represented himself as a "motorcycle boy" with his "motorcycle jacket" and wallet chain. This was the first moment where he began to articulate his style as persona, and developed a more coherent sense of style that could be readily applied to personality and activity. By the 2008 release of *Tha Carter III* Wayne had begun his transition to his skater look wearing West-coast styled converse and khakis. This look would be a more fully realized mixture of skateboarding, rock star rebel two years later with the appropriately titled *Rebirth* rock/rap album. Later in 2010 he released *I Am Not a Human Being* while he was still in jail serving eight months for weapon and drug charge. This album marked the new script for his self-revision that extended his "we are not the same I am a Martian" rhetoric to his dress code. Like his parodist exaggeration of self, this new rap persona sidesteps the tangle of his being a raced body by claiming to not be human at all.

Hip Hop music *is*, similar to Kofsky's estimation of Jazz, "an art created and nurtured by black people in this country out of the wealth of their historical experience." Hip Hop music is a cultural production originating in the material cultures of the African

Diaspora which has continued to speak specifically through the lived experience of Blacks in the U.S. and internationally. This is not to assert that Hip Hop music is exclusively U.S. or Black; rather, it is Black U.S. music that can be performed, consumed, and co-opted by others. Here, I agree with Baker that "…rap is now classically black sound." While its roots are much more dispersed, Hip Hop was and is firstly produced by African Americans and the nature of that African American context, are its historical, lyrical and rhythmical foundation (whether trace, thread or essence). Therefore, the fundamental assumption here, in outlining the representations of markers of the U.S. and the U.S. South is that Hip Hop artists are aware and responding to the specificity of their context—that to take an artist outside of his national or regional context is to undermine the historical legacy of the people that artist represents and to address the art less fully.[258]

H. Samy Alim's, *Roc the Mic Right*, proceeds from a cultural nationalist impulse that theorizes continuity throughout the experience and expression of Hip Hop culture as a new transnational nation that minimizes, indeed renders obsolete traditionalist formations of nation-states. These new boundaries (while he and other scholars often call the Hip Hop Nation *borderless*, they mean the boundaries are not fixed geographically fixed, not that they are all-encompassing) are created and sustained through communities' interaction to create new space for imaginary communities to exist and create.

This is not an unfamiliar impulse for Black Studies scholars. Much of what is called Black Art has its roots in articulating a space for being by excavating and reimagining blackness, rehabilitating what was lost in racist constructions of identity. As Schomburg writes, "a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the

---

[258] Kofsky, 9.

antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away…" However, Schomburg aptly warns against the type of imaginative history (we might call all scholarship some attempt at *imagining* history) that is "pathetically over-corrective… apologetics turned biography." Schomburg represents the delicate balance Hip Hop scholars must strike in creating histories of the music. The traditional national contexts are incredibly relevant. I pose the same question of Hip Hop Nationals as Paul Gilroy, "How is black life in one 'hood connected to others?" While, I don't agree that this connection is decreasing in significance, as Gilroy might, I do think that we can and should acknowledge historical and material conditions of difference between one African Diaspora community and the other.[259]

Additionally, while the diehard postmodern would reject the notion of canonization and taxonomy, in trying to explain and define postmodernism, scholars often describe Hip Hop music and Hip Hop as a genre within the postmodern canon of art. Mostly, it seems, because they have nowhere else to put it. However, postmodern scholars have taught us better than the rest that "the canon is also a network of aesthetic assumptions and social biases—and implicit cultural and economic priorities—built into and reinvoked by the range of texts it includes." Further, "a taxonomy of mutually exclusive categories will also consistently falsify the history of aesthetic innovation." It seems that in an ironic turn, many scholars see Hip Hop music as so inherently different and *essentially* other that it is impossible to conceive of their place within the traditional canon of black U.S. resistance music.[260]

---

[259] Baker 100. Lewis, 61.

[260] Forman and Neal 89. Cary Nelson, 40, 180.

Therefore, Hip Hop music is defined in terms of a perceived rupture and incompatibility. It seems that merely representing the contemporary Black voice or experience as central to a narrative is quite enough for the work to be characterized as postmodern. Peter Kolchin's work on the development of slave identities in colonial America reminds us of the ethical implications of this taxonomy of difference. He argues that in order to justify slavery colonists had to develop an African identity that was *inalterably alien* and unable to be assimilated into American identity.

Black art forms are often defined within the borders of postmodernism in order to attack ideas of black essentialism. However, the continued violence and infringement into/on the creation of resistant black subjectivity and identity requires us to rethink the haste with which a postmodern construct discredits essence. We might say instead, as Singh does, that black culture in America often represents an autonomous character (while I would argue that this character is not necessarily anti-American) and its artistic productions are an outcropping of that multifaceted and shifting character.

This argument does not intend to build a universal model for the black American aesthetic or the black Southern aesthetic(though I don't think those models, as summary not prescriptions, are necessarily flawed); essentialist and Universalist constructs are often misused to justify racist constructions of Black identity. However, it is important to acknowledge that if essentialist constructs are merely imagined, they still operate in America to create raced identities that are perceive as *real* within U.S. pop culture. Since the institutionalized and hardened identities created during slavery, the U.S. has had little trouble racing its Black population and the Black population has had little trouble racing itself. It seems contradictory to the autonomy of Black art and the supposed ends of postmodernism to assume race not to be constitutive (while not the entirety) of identity or

to assume that race or genre itself makes a work inherently postmodern.

No single black face should be given the authority of authenticity, but as black people, artists, and intellectuals we should strive to see into and beyond the various images we are presented with in order to preserve and protect Black art and people. However, this does not negate the usefulness of a Black Arts aesthetic and the usefulness of racialized identity constructions. Hip Hop is historically one of the most resilient and dynamic black art forms in America. Patrick Neate asserts this "cultural capital" as the most important aspect of Hip Hop that Black American artist must reclaim from the music industry, saying "However you choose to define hip-hop, it surely should not be defined as a medium through which big business can further oppress the oppressed or exclude the excluded."[261] I add to this the problem of the way we view scholarship and the way academics go about defining the other and analyzing artistic production in terms of fracture instead of addressing coherence. Therefore, it is useful to use a frame that acknowledges the pervasiveness of race and nation as foundational narratives. This seems to nudge toward praxis for framing criticism of black American art. Ironically, it is often well-meaning postmodern critics that are complicit with the Hip Hop Nationalist critic to write Hip Hop music out of the canon both of American music and African American music. Paradoxically, and perhaps naively, we might see Hip Hop music as representative of the possibility of black agency within the "fully American" U.S. nationalist identity. While Blacks might have rejected imperialism, empire and hyper capitalism, I would argue, many articulated an identity situated within the U.S. as nation and its founding ideology as redemptive. Frederick Douglass and King, (even, perhaps Hughes and

---

[261] Patrick Neate 258

Ellison), seem to illustrate the anxieties and possibilities of this black Americanness as being a space of oppositional resistance that is not fully Black Nationalist, nor intergrationalist, nor global.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Asante, M.K., Jr. *It's Bigger than Hip-hop: The Rise of the Post-hip-hop Generation*. New York : St. Martin's Press, 2008.

Alim, H. Samy. *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Alim, Samy H. "Hip Hop Nation Language," *Language in the USA, Themes for the Twenty First Century* eds Edward Finegan and John R. Rickford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Asim, Jabari. *What Obama Means: ...for Our Culture, Our Politics, Our Future*. New York: William Morrow, 2009.

Bailey, Eric J. *The Cultural Rights Movement: Fulfilling the Promise of Civil Rights for African Americans*. Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2010.

Baker, Houston A. *Afro-American Poetics: Revisions of Harlem and the Black Aesthetic*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.

----. *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

----. *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

----. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Banner-Haley, Charles Pete T. *From Du Bois to Obama: African American Intellectuals in the Public Forum*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010.

Barkley, Elizabeth F. *Crossroads: Popular Music in America*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, c2003.

Bennett, Andy, and Richard A. Peterson. *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.

Berger, Harris M and Michael Thomas Carroll eds. *Global Pop, Local Language.* University Press of Mississippi, 2003.

Berry, Jason, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Jones. *Up from the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II*. Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2009.

Black, D.A., Kolesnikova, N.A., and Taylor, L.J. "The Economic Progress of African Americans in Urban Areas: A Tale of 14 Cities" *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* vol. 92 no. 5 (2010): 353-379.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism Without Racists*. Lanham (Md.): Rowman & Littlefield Pub, 2010.

Bowman, Robert M. J. *Soulsville, U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1997.

Bullard, Robert D. *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century: Race, Power, and Politics of Place*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007.

Burnim, Mellonee V., and Portia K. Maultsby, eds. *African American Music: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Butler, Paul. *Let's Get Free: A Hip-hop Theory of Justice*. New York: New Press: Distributed by Perseus Distribution, 2009.

Campbell, Kermit Ernest. *Gettin' our Groove on: Rhetoric, Language, and Literacy for the Hip Hop Generation*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, c2005.

Carroll, Susan J., and Richard Logan Fox, eds. *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Carter, Ronald, and Michael McCarthy. "Talking, Creating: Interactional Language, Creativity, and Context." *Applied Linguistics* 25.1 (2004): 62-. *ProQuest Research Library.* Web. 13 Oct. 2011.

Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation.* New York : St. Martin's Press, 2005.

----. ed. *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-hop*. New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2006.

Cheney, Charise L. *Brothers Gonna Work it Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism.* New York : New York University Press, c2005.

Cheyne, A and Binder, A. "Cosmopolitan Preferences: The Constitutive Role of Place in American Elite Taste for Hip-hop Music 1991-2005" *Poetics* vol. 38 no. 3 (2010): 336-364

Clayton, Dewey M. *The Presidential Campaign of Barack Obama: A Critical Analysis of a Racially Transcendent Strategy*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Cohn, Nik. *Triksta: Life and Death and New Orleans Rap*. New York: Knopf, 2005.

Condry, Ian. *Hip-hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Cooper, B. Lee. "'Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?' Discovery, Dominance, and Decline of Crescent City Popular Music influence, 1946-2006" *Popular Music and Society*31.2 (2008): 151-190.

Costello, Mark. *Signifying Rappers: Rap and Race in the Urban Present*, New York: Ecco Press, c1990.

Cowley, John. "Really the 'Walking Blues': Son House, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson and the Development of a Traditional Blues" *Popular Music* Vol. 1, (1981): 57-72.

Daniel, Jack L and Linda F. Wharton. Black American Rhetoric [electronic resource] : A Selected Bibliography: Distributed by ERIC Clearinghouse, 1976.

Dear, Michael J., and Scott, Allen J., eds. *Urbanization and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society*. London: Methuen, 1981.

Dimitriadis, Greg. *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice*. New York: Peter Lang, 2009.

Doherty, Mike. EYE MAGAZINE/, February 10th 2005, retrieved from http://www.whatsthe411.ca/?pageID=65

Dyson, Micheal Eric. *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's Illmatic*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2010.

Dyson, Michael Eric. *Know what I mean?: Reflections on Hip-hop*. New York: Basic Civitas; [London : Perseus Running, distributor], 2007.

Dyson, Michael Eric. *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003.

Edwards, L.. "Little Road Trips from Hell." *Callaloo* 34, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 63-68,231-232. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Fernando, S. H. *The New Beats: Exploring the Music, Culture, and Attitudes of Hip-hop*. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1994.

Farrar, M.. "Home/Sick: Memory, Place, and Loss in New Orleans." Theory & Event 12, no. 4 (October 1, 2009). http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Finegan, Edward, and John R. Rickford, eds. *Language in the U.S.A.: Themes for the 21st Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Florida, R and Jackson S, 2010 “Sonic City: The Evolving Economic Geography of the Music Industry” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* vol. 29 no. 3 (2010): 310-321

Florida R, Mellander C, Stolarick K. "Music Scenes to Music Clusters: The Economic Geography of Music in the US, 1970 – 2000" *Environment and Planning A* vol. 42 no. 4 (2010): 785–804.

Foner, Philip Sheldon, and Clayborne Carson. *The Black Panthers Speak*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2002.

Foreman, Murray, and Mark Anthony Neal. *That’s the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Franklin,V.P."Jackanapes: Reflections on the Legacy of the Black Panther Party for the Hip Hop Generation." The Journal of African American History 92, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 553-560. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/(accessed November 9, 2010).

Friedmann, John. “Where We Stand: a Decade of World City Research,” in *World Cities in a World-System.* Paul Knox and Peter J. Taylor eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Gates, Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

George, Nelson. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Viking, 1998.

----. *Where Did Our Love Go?: The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound*. Music in American life. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

Graham, A.. "Free at Last: Post-Katrina New Orleans and the Future of Conspiracy." Journal of American Studies: Hurricane Katrina: Five Years After 44, no. 3 (August 1, 2010): 601-611. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Grant, Jurgen. *Kinds of Blue*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004.

Griffin, Farah. "At Last . . . ? : Michelle Obama, Beyoncé, Race & History." Daedalus 140, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 131-141,8. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Griffin, Farah. "Children of Omar: Resistance and Reliance in the Expressive Cultures of Black New Orleans Cultures." Journal of Urban History 35, no. 5 (July 1, 2009): 656-667. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Guy-Sheftall, Beverly, and Johnnetta B. Cole. *Who Should Be First?: Feminists Speak Out on the 2008 Presidential Campaign*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2010.

Hamilton, Marybeth. *In Search of the Blues*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.

Hartnell, A. "Katrina Tourism and a Tale of Two Cities: Visualizing Race and Class in New Orleans." American Quarterly 61, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 723-747,832. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Hill, Johnny Bernard. *The First Black President: Barack Obama, Race, Politics, and the American Dream*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Hill-Collins, Patricia. *From Black power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 2006.

Hornsby, Alton. *Southerners, Too? Essays on the Black South 1733-1990*. Lantham, MD: University Press of America, 2004.

Hobson, Fred C. *South to the Future: An American Region in the Twenty-First Century*. Mercer University Lamar memorial lectures, no. 44. Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

Iser, Wolfgang. *How to Do Theory* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Range of Interpretation* New York: Columbia University Press, 2000

Jabir, J. "On Conjuring Mahalia: Mahalia Jackson, New Orleans, and the Sanctified Swing." American Quarterly 61, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 649-669,832. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Jackson, John A. *A House on Fire: The Rise and Fall of Philadelphia Soul*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Joseph, Peniel E. *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama*. New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books, 2010.

Kitwana, Bakari. *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American culture*. New York: Basic Civitas, 2002.

----. *The Rap on Gangsta Rap: Who Run It?: Gangsta Rap and Visions of Black Violence*. Chicago : Third World Press, 1994.

-----. *Why White Kids Love Hip-hop: wankstas, wiggers, wannabes, and the new reality of race in America*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005.

Kloppenberg, James T. *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Kofsky, Frank. *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*. New York: Pathfinder Press,

1970.

Kouwenhoven, John Atlee. *The Arts in Modern American Civilization*. The Norton library. New York: W.W. Norton, 1967.

Krims, Adam. *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. New perspectives in music history and criticism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Le Menestrel, S., and J. Henry. ""Sing Us Back Home": Music, Place, and the Production of Locality in Post-Katrina New Orleans." Popular Music and Society 33, no. 2 (May 1, 2010): 179. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Lena, J., and R. Peterson. "Classification as Culture: Types and Trajectories of Music Genres." American Sociological Review 73, no. 5 (October 1, 2008): 697-718. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011

Lewis, David Levering, ed. *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader.* New York: Penguin Group, 1994.

Lipsitz, George. *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Liu, Amy, and Allison Plyer. *The New Orleans Index at Five: Measuring Greater New Orleans' Progress Toward Prosperity*. Washington: Brookings Institution and Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, 2010.

Locke, Alain LeRoy. *The Negro and His Music*. Kennikat Press series in Negro culture and history. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968.

Lornell, Kip. *From Jubilee to Hip Hop: Readings in African American Music*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010.

Marable, Manning, ed. *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Marable, Manning, and Kristen Clarke. *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America's New Leadership*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

McQuillar, Tayannah Lee, and Freddie Lee Johnson. *Tupac Shakur: The Life and Times of an American Icon*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010.

McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

McKinney, Louise. *New Orleans: A Cultural History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

McWhorter, John. *All About the Beat: Why Hip-hop Can't Save Black America*. New York: Gotham Books, 2008.

Mieder, Wolfgang. *"Yes We Can": Barack Obama's Proverbial Rhetoric*. New York: Peter Lang, 2009.

Molotch, H. "Place in Product" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* vol. 26 no. 4 (2002): 665-88.

Neal, Mark Anthony, and Murray Forman. *That's the Joint! : the Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Neate, Patrick. *Where You're At*: *Notes from the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet.* New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.

Nelson, Cary. *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945*. Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

Ogbar, Jeffery O.G. *Hip-hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007.

Obama, Barack. *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006.

Obama, Barack, and David Olive. *An American Story: The Speeches of Barack Obama : a Primer*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2008

Ortiz, Paul. *Emancipation Betrayed*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.

Perry, Imani. *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Phiddian, Robert. "Are Parody and Deconstruction Secretly the Same Thing?" *New Literary History* 28.4 (1997): 673,673-696. *ProQuest Research Library.* Web. 13 Oct. 2011.

Potter, Russell. *Spectacular Vernaculars*. New York: SUNY Press, 1995.

Pierre, Robert E., and Jon Jeter. *A Day Late and a Dollar Short: High Hopes and Deferred Dreams in Obama's "Postracial" America*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2010.

Reed, Ishmael. *Mixing It Up: Taking on the Media Bullies and Other Reflections*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2008.

Rose, Al. *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-*

Light District. University: University of Alabama Press, 1974.

Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994.

----. *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why It Matters*. New York: BasicCivitas, 2008.

Rosen, Jody. "Tha Carter III." 26 Jun 2008. *Rolling Stone*. 10 Dec 2008. http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/album/21080575/review/21127308/tha_carter_iii.

Sabato, Larry. *THE YEAR OF OBAMA: How Barack Obama Won the White House*. New York: Longman, 2010.

Sassen, Saskia. *Cities in a World Economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2006.

Scott, Allen John. *The Cultural Economy of Cities: Essays on the Geography of Image-Producing Industries*. London: SAGE Publications, 2000.

Scott, Allen John. *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Scott, Allen John. *Social Economy of the Metropolis: Cognitive-Cultural Capitalism and the Global Resurgence of Cities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Shank, Barry. *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'N' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994.

Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean, and Barack Obama. *The Speech: Race and Barack Obama's "A More Perfect Union."* New York: Bloomsbury, 2009.

Shockley, Evie. *Renegade Poetics: Black Aesthetics and Formal Innovation in African American Poetry*. Iowa City : University of Iowa Press, c2011.

Singh, Nikhil Pal. *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Music/culture. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998.

Schlesinger, Arthur R. *The Disuniting of America*. New York: Norton, 1998.

Smith, Arhur, ed., *Language, Communication, and Rhetoric in Black America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin That Talk: Language, Culture, and Education in African America*.

New York: Routledge, 2000.

Stanonis, A.. "The Triumph of Epicure: A Global History of New Orleans Culinary Tourism." Southern Quarterly 46, no. 3 (April 1, 2009): 145-161,181. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Taylor, H. "After the Deluge: The Post-Katrina Cultural Revival of New Orleans." Journal of American Studies: Hurricane Katrina: Five Years After 44, no. 3 (August 1, 2010): 483-501. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Terrill, Eobert E. "Colonizing the Borderlands: Shifting Circumference in the Rhetoric of Malcolm X." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86.1 (2000): 67,67-85. *ProQuest Research Library.* Web. 13 Oct. 2011.

Tesler, Michael, and David O. Sears. *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Thomas, L. ""Roots Run Deep Here": The Construction of Black New Orleans in Post-Katrina Tourism Narratives." American Quarterly 61, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 749-768,834. http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/ (accessed March 20, 2011).

Trader-Leigh, Karyn . "Understanding the Role of African American Churches and Clergy in Community Crisis Response." Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies 2008.

Tuck, Stephen G. N. *We Ain't What We Ought to Be: The Black Freedom Struggle, from Emancipation to Obama*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

Walker, Alice. *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1997.

Walser, Robert. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Music/culture. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993.

Watkins, S. Craig. *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005.

Watts, Rebecca Bridges. *Contemporary Southern Identity: Community Through Controversy*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

Wilson, F.H. "The Changing Distribution of the African-American Population in the United States, 1980-1990" *Urban League Review* vol. 15 no. 2 (1992): 53-74.

Wise, Tim J. *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2010.

Woldu, Gail Hilson. "The Kaleidoscope of Writing on Hip-hop Culture." *Notes* 67, no. 1 (2010): 9-38. http://muse.jhu.edu/ (accessed September 21, 2010), doi: 10.1353/not.2010.0031.

Womack, Ytasha. *Post Black: How a New Generation Is Redefining African American Identity*. Chicago, Ill: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010.

Woodward, C. Vann. *The Burden of Southern History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.

Yancy, George. *White on White/black on Black.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

Discography

Jenkins, Jay. The Inspiration. Corporate Thugz/Def Jam, 2006.

---. The Recession. Corporate Thugz/Def Jam, 2008.

Lil Wayne. *500 Degrees*

----.*Tha Block is Hot* Cash Money Records. CD. 2002.

----. *Tha Carter.* Cash Money Records. CD 2004.

----. *Tha Carter II.* Cash Money Records 000512402. CD. 2005.
.
----. *Tha Carter III*. Cash Money Records 001197702. CD. 2008.

----. *Rebirth*. Universal Motown BOO12737 CD. 2010.

----. *I Am Not a Human Being*. Universal Motown 15002. Digital Download. 2010.

Williams, Bryan and Dwayne Carter. *Like Father, Like Son*. Cash Money Records CD. 2006.

Mos Def. *Black on Both Sides*. Rawkus Records 112905. CD. 2002

OutKast. *Southernplayalisticaddilacmusik*. LaFace/Arista,1994.

---. *ATLiens*. LaFace/Arista, 1996.

---. *Aquemini*. LaFace/Arista, 1998.

---. *Stankonia*. LaFace/Arista, 2000.

Newspapers, Magazines, and Websites

Vibe

Source

XXL

New York Times

The Times Picayune

MetroLyrics.com Copyright © 2004-2008

Lyrics Domain.com Copyright © 2000 – 2008

6lyrics.com.com No copyright information on site.

Rap Basement.com Copyright © 1999-2008

sing365.com Copyright © 2002