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FREAKS OF THE INDUSTRY:

PECULIARITIES OF PLACE AND RACE IN BAY AREA HIP-HOP

Committee:

John Hartigan, Jr., Supervisor

Kathleen Stewart

Richard R. Flores

Domino Perez

S. Craig Watkins

FREAKS OF THE INDUSTRY:
PECULIARITIES OF PLACE AND RACE IN BAY AREA HIP-HOP

by

Amanda Maria Morrison, B.A., M.A.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Alan Stewart Morrison and Martha Dolores Morrison, who always encouraged me and never told me pursuing a Ph.D. in anthropology was "impractical."

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Freaks of the Industry:
Peculiarities of Place and Race in Bay Area Hip-Hop

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Through ethnography, I examine how hip-hop's expressive forms are being used as the raw materials of everyday life by residents of the San Francisco Bay Area, home to what many regard as one of the most stylistically prolific, politically charged, and racially diverse hip-hop "scenes" in the world. This focus on regional specificity provides a greater understanding of the impact hip-hop is having on the ground, as an aspect of localized lived practice. Throughout, I make the case for the importance of ethnographically grounded localized research on U.S. hip-hop, which is surprisingly still relatively rare. Most scholars simply stress its continuity within a set of deterritorialized Diasporic African and African-American verbal-art traditions. My aim is not to contest this assertion, but to add to the body of knowledge about one of the most significant cultural inventions of the twentieth century by exploring hip-hop's racial heterogeneity and its regional specificity.

Acknowledging this kind of diversity allows us to reconceive what hip-hop is and how it matters in U.S. society beyond the ways it is usually framed: as either an

oppositional form of black-vernacular culture or a co-opted and corrupted commodity form that reinscribes hegemonic values more than it actually contests them. Examining hip-hop within a specific, regionally delineated community reveals how hip-hop's role in American life is more nuanced and complex. It is neither a pure vernacular expression of an oppressed class nor merely a cultural commodity imposed upon consumers and alienated from producers. In the Bay Area, hip-hop "heads" simultaneously consume mass-produced rap while producing homespun forms of music, dance, slang, fashion, and folklore. Through these forms, they construct individual and group identities that register primarily in expressive, affective terms. These novel cultural identities complicate rigid social markers of race, gender, and class; more specifically, they challenge the widely held perception that hip-hop is solely the terrain of inner-city young African-American men. More fundamentally, a sense of belonging is engendered through localized modes of expression and embodied style that manifest through shared practices, discourses, texts, symbols, locales, and imaginaries.

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Introduction

From about 2004 to 2006, Bay Area hip-hop was all about celebration. With the popularization of the "hyphy movement"—an exuberant regional style of urban music, dance, and dress that garnered national attention from everyone from MTV to *USA Today*[1]—it looked like the Bay was finally going to earn its place on the rap music's geographic "mattering map" (Grossberg 1992:82). Home to one of the U.S.'s most musically avant-garde, linguistically innovative, politically charged, and commercially independent hip-hop scenes, the San Francisco Bay Area had long been an extremely active and influential node of rap music production. It had just never received much recognition within the corporate media for all of its contributions.

But by the winter of 2007 everyone seemed to be in mourning. The colorful graphic hoodies favored by hyphy kids gave way to black pea coats, sweatshirts and knit caps—outfits that had all the flair and flamboyance of a longshoreman clocking in at the Oakland shipyards for a 4am shift. You could still spot teenage girls wearing rainbow-striped leggings and neon-pink braids—a uniquely feminine manifestation of hyphy's cheeky, irrepressible style; likewise, young guys continued to sport thick, flowing dreadlocks and ridiculously oversized white t-shirts—the basic hyphy uniform for men. But those plain white tees now appeared more commonly emblazoned with customized "R.I.P." decals memorializing fallen homies.

[1] MTV produced two segments on the hyphy movement. In 2004, MTV News ran the feature "Hyphy: Crunk, Northern California Style" (http://www.mtv.com/bands/h/hypy/news_feature_110804/). In 2006, MTV News produced an episode of its "My Block" series on "The Bay"

This was no time for celebration. The murder rate in the blue-collar city of Oakland, where the hyphy movement emerged, had soared to its highest level in ten years. San Francisco saw a similar increase in homicides, though this fact was largely lost on the tech-industry elites who had colonized the city, pushing poorer residents into segregated outlying enclaves where crime was concentrated. Even working-class Bay Area suburbs like Vallejo, Richmond, Hayward, and Antioch saw spikes in violence (Bulwa 2006). In each case, the victims were primarily young people, mostly low-income youth of color between the ages of 15 and 24, the population most closely associated with local hip-hop.

Despite harsh times for many of its residents, the San Francisco Bay Area soldiers on as a rich and trendsetting site for contemporary hip-hop. This project focuses on the ways in which a specific, ever-changing, and fraught set of local circumstances—political, cultural, social, economic, and historical—combine with hip-hop's globally circulating forms to generate a unique regional music "scene" that is far from static. My research builds upon previous works charting hip-hop's transformation from a localized New York youth subculture into one of the entertainment industry's most lucrative products, exported globally in the form of recordings, film, fashion, magazines, advertisements, and other commodities. But rather than generalize about hip-hop's worldwide influence, or its role in society at large, this project shifts focus back to the local, the specific, and the particular. Through ethnography, I examine how hip-hop's expressive forms are being used as the raw materials of everyday life by residents of the

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(http://www.mtv.com/bands/m/my_block/oakland/news_feature_030506/index.jhtml). In April of 2006 an article about hyphy written by Steve Jones appeared in *USA Today* (Jones 2006).

San Francisco Bay Area. This focus on regional specificity provides a greater understanding of the impact hip-hop culture is having on the ground, as an aspect of localized lived practice.

By "hip-hop," I refer to an entire cultural tradition comprised of four distinct "elements" or "pillars": 1) rapping or MCing; 2) DJ and "beatmaking"; 3) b-boying and b-girling; and 4) graffiti or "aerosol art." Paraphrasing cultural-studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg's notion of the "rock formation" (1992), I sometimes use the term "hip-hop formation" to better capture the multifaceted nature of hip-hop, a decades-old cultural movement often incorrectly reduced to or conflated with the musical genre of "rap." Rather, the hip-hop formation encompasses specific stylistic repertoires and discursive knowledges—typically expressed through musical performances, street slang, fashion, visual art, bodily comportment—as well as the industry mechanisms that have developed to support, disseminate, and exploit those repertoires. As with the concept of "popular culture," it has to be understood both in terms of production and performance as well as consumption and audience (Fiske 1989:35).

"Hip-hop formation," because it encompasses industry machinations, differs somewhat from Dick Hebdige's classic definition of "subculture" as "the expressive forms and rituals of subordinate groups" (1991:2), which he characterizes in terms of highly stylized acts of "defiance or contempt…It signals a Refusal" (3). Although occasionally I refer to Bay Area hip-hop as a "subculture" given its resistive tendencies, market marginality, and localized scale, more commonly I use the term "scene" (Bennett & Peterson 2004) to refer to the gamut of interrelated places, people, and practices that comprise this geographically defined if tenuously connected community, a community

whose contours and character undergo continual redefinition among members. Organized around a set of shared cultural affinities and rituals, the concept of a "scene" works somewhat like Benedict Anderson's notion of an "imagined community" (1983). Anderson develops the concept of imagined communities to explain the way in which large social aggregates—in his case, nation-states—gel together amid changing circumstances through shared myths and ideologies. Through common discourses, individuals come to understand themselves as citizens, as members of collective entities, without the need of physical proximity or direct interpersonal contact. Anderson's notion of imagined communities is especially apt in discussions of hip-hop, a cultural formation often described in terms of nation: a "hip-hop nation" that unites fans and practitioners across geographic boundaries and government borders.

In charting hip-hop's global geography, scholars have begun to explore the ways in which people creatively adapt its expressive forms in locales as varied as South Africa, New Zealand, Italy, Cuba, and Japan (and, in this case, Northern California). Such studies often stress hip-hop's transnational, migratory, deterritorialized nature, emphasizing how it has become unmoored from any originary setting or production base (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycock 2008; Basu & Lemelle 2006; Condry 2006; Krims 2000; Mitchell 1996; Mitchell 2001; Osumare 2007; Spady, Alim & Meghelli 2006). Given that hip-hop is no longer centralized in any one city or even country, and is far from homogenous in terms of the race, ethnicity, and nationality, the task at hand is to attend to its particularities within diverse social settings and assess how "hip-hop matters" (Watkins 2005) in different communities throughout the "hip-hop nation." Media scholar S. Craig Watkins poses this fundamental question in his appropriately titled book *Hip-*

Hop Matters: Politics, Popular Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement (2005). Ultimately, after looking at numerous sites of hip-hop activity across the U.S., including the Bay Area, Watkins concludes that the significance of hip-hop rests in its lasting relevance as a vehicle for young people to express their generational concerns and desires, to assert their unique identity and place in the world, and to speak truth to power. Focusing particularly on hip-hop's potential to fuel social change, Watkins describes the Bay Area scene as "one of the most politically active hip-hop communities in the world" (2005:165). Further, that "[i]n the mountainous terrain, vast highways, and eclectic bed of urban and suburban communities that make of California's Bay Area, young people of different colors, creeds, and cultural ancestry have made hip hop an incredibly vital fountain of identity and creativity, expression and exploration, pleasure and politics" (164).

Indeed, if hip-hop is a nation, then the Bay Area is one of its key provinces. Hip-hop culture thrives in this racially and culturally diverse, politically progressive, resource-rich region of Northern California, an area that includes three "global cities" (Sassen 2001)—San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose—as well as sprawling suburban, periurban, and exurban surrounds. Over the past two decades, DJs and MCs from the Bay have influenced major currents in hip-hop, including its slang, sound, lyrical content, and overall "swagger" or style: from the "mack" mythology of Too $hort to the street neologisms of E-40 to the Afrocentric radicalism of Paris to the turntable innovations of Q-Bert, local artists have left a lasting mark on hip-hop worldwide. This regional scene's cultural output is so prolific, sprawling, and diverse that it requires delineation between two distinctive "camps" just to talk about it—hip-hop camps that locals refer using

analogous phrases such as “backpacker,” “conscious,” or “underground,” on the one hand, and “hardcore,” “hyphy,” “turf,” “street,” or “gangster,” on the other.

Because the Bay Area is on U.S. soil, however, it is easily overlooked by researchers focused on “global” popular culture, particularly by cultural anthropologists interested in media production and consumption within non-Western “thirdspace” contexts. Bay Area hip-hop is certainly of “the West” in the sense that it is an urban American subculture. Ironically, in the context of American hip-hop, “the West” actually connotes something like the opposite of the center-to-periphery, “Occident”-vs.-“Orient” dichotomy of imperialistic Eurocentrism. When rappers invoke “the West” they are usually referring to the U.S. West Coast, which stands in a marginal position to the dominant East Coast industrial base of New York City. This marginality, this location away from and in the shadow of rap music’s hegemonic and originary metropole, is fundamental to the way in which Bay Area hip-hoppers think of themselves and their entire community, as “freaks of the industry.” I borrow this phrase from the title of a classic track by Oakland hip-hop pioneers Digital Underground. Although the “freakiness” expounded upon in the song refers primarily to the erotic misadventures and uninhibited sexual proclivities of its performers, “Freaks of the Industry” (1990) helped establish an appealingly oddball identity for Digital Underground, a group whose comedic free-spiritedness is encapsulated in the freaky persona of “Humpty Hump,” the Groucho mask-wearing alter ego of lead rapper Shock G.

“Freaks of the Industry” also helped set the tone for the entire regional rap scene, which gained a reputation in the 1990s for producing nonconformist, irreverent artists who often defy market expectations. I argue that this still-extant ethos of eclecticism

translates into an unusual sense of openness around racial politics that is still one of the most salient features of the scene today, a scene where Watkins surmises there "is no debate or discernible tension regarding hip hop's multiracial face; it is simply accepted as a matter of fact" (2005:164). Although the majority of the most prominent artists in both the backpacker and hardcore hip-hop camps are African American, both spheres commonly embrace non-blacks so long as they display adequate knowledge and respect: for hip-hop history in the case of the former and the "code of the streets" in the latter case. Indeed, "race matters" (West 1993) in Bay Area hip-hop. This project examines precisely *how* it matters within social spaces that offer, much like the racially mixed neighborhoods in Detroit studied by anthropologist John Hartigan, numerous "instances and situations in which the significance of race spills out of the routinized confines of these absolute [black-and-white] figures, [so] we can begin to rethink the institutionalization of racial difference and similarity in this country" (Hartigan 1999:3).

Hip-Hop Ethnography

Through in-depth site-specific research, I examine how hip-hop's cultural forms are adapted by enthusiasts within a given region as part of their place-making and identity formation process, a process animated by perceived oppositional "underdog" or renegade status within the hip-hop nation. The method that I think is most compatible with this project is ethnography, with its eye for the particular and the local. Implicitly throughout, I make the case that ethnography provides the ideal means to apprehend locally derived pop-cultural practices as they relate to broader sociocultural forces because of its methodological emphasis on sustained, geographically grounded, community-based field

research. Rather bafflingly, ethnography remains profoundly underutilized not only in studies of hip-hop but of urban subcultures more generally, particularly in the United States. The few hip-hop ethnographies that do exist constitute a recently emergent body of work: Greg Dimitriadis' *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice* (2001), Marcyliena Morgan's *The Real Hiphop - Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the Underground* (2009), H. Samy Alim's *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip-Hop Culture* (2006), Joseph Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (2004), and Anthony Kwame Harrison's *Hip-Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (2009).

Dimitriadis bases his research in a community center in a small Midwest city, where he ran a hip-hop activity group for black teens. Though limited in terms of the book's length and his sample size, Dimitriadis expands the notion of rap-music fandom beyond the mere act of commodity consumption, framing it instead as a creative, productive practice tied deeply to the identity construction of his young consultants. Although he claims that performance is his primary unit of analysis, he uses the notion of performance in the broadest sense, in terms of the performance of identity and the everyday discursive practices of young African-American rap fans.

Marcyliena Morgan focuses on artistic performance in the stricter sense, examining innovative uses of African-American English (AAE) among improvisational "freestyle" and "battle" rappers associated with Project Blowed in Los Angeles, a longstanding and noted open-mic workshop that convenes highly skilled "underground" MCs, several of whom eventually become nationally influential recording artists (including Aceyalone, Abstract Rude, Medusa, 2Mex, and Busdriver). A sociolinguist,

Morgan emphasizes the metadiscursive, self-regulating, and self-critical aspects of this "underground" scene—those aesthetic criteria and principles she argues constitute a cohesive "hiphop language ideology" (2009:11). Morgan's account of the hip-hop "underground" informs my own research on one faction or "camp" of the diverse Bay Area scene that participants similarly refer to as "underground" or alternatively with terms such as "backpacker," "conscious," "alternative" or "independent." (I discuss this "camp" extensively in Chapters Four and Six.) In fact, the "underground" social network of rappers Morgan explores actually extends up to the Bay Area; throughout my research, I repeatedly noticed the existence close social ties between consultants I worked with and those mentioned in Morgan's work.

Despite these convergences, I see my work as departing from Morgan's in its greater attention to racial diversity. Morgan largely takes blackness for granted in conjunction with the uses African American English she observes. While Project Blowed is unquestionably an African-American-majority cultural space, it has also helped cultivate the talents of notable non-black underground MCs, including ascendant Chicano rapper 2Mex, a member of the group Visionaries (which also includes white and Japanese-American artists).[2] Additionally, since Morgan is specifically interested in language, her focus is limited to rappers/MCs, whereas hip-hop culture as a whole includes nonlinguistic idioms such as dance (breakers, poppers, lockers), visual art (graffiti muralists), and sonic production (DJs and beatmakers/producers). Finally,

[2] At the 2008 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, on a panel entitled "Global Flows: Hip-Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language"—for which Marcyliena Morgan served as discussant—sociology graduate student Jooyoung Lee and linguistics graduate student Lauren Mason Carris confirmed the salience of non-African-American participation at Project Blowed. Their co-

despite her reportedly seven years conducting field research among the Project Blowed community (2009:14), Morgan in actuality only includes one chapter of *The Real Hiphop* that is "ethnographic" in strictest sense, in that it includes detailed descriptions and analyses of cultural spaces and events directly observed.

A colleague of Morgan's, linguistic anthropologist H. Samy Alim contributes what he refers to as a "Hiphopography" with his *Roc the Mic Right* (2006), a work that investigates language use within hip-hop lyricism, performance (both structured and improvisational), and everyday speech. Much like Morgan's study, Alim's inquiry examines how hip-hop "both builds upon and expands the Black American Oral Tradition" (69). His primary methodology can best be understood as discourse analysis, yet he draws units of speech from a variety of nonlocal and erratic sources: occasionally song lyrics, anecdotal memory, bits of circulating slang and discourse—a process that elides his call in the beginning of his book for increased in-depth, site-specific field research on hip-hop language and culture that better incorporates the views of in-culture consultants: "Too often in scholarship on Hip Hop Culture, Hip Hop artists and practitioners are talked about, but very seldom are they themselves talking…How has our methodology silenced and disempowered the very folks we claim to be giving voice to and empowering?" (12). Alim better represents those voices in *The Global Cipha* (2006), a work exploring local-global or "glocal" (35) dynamics in hip-hop co-written with Samir Meghelli and James Spady. *The Global Cipha* includes extensive quotes, including long-form interviews with pioneering Bay Area rappers JT tha Bigga Figga, San Quinn, and

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presentation, "Performing Race and Ethnicity in Freestyle Battles," focused on negotiations of race by Latino and Asian freestyle rappers at these open mics.

the Delinquents, and even includes some discussion of the hyphy movement as an exemplar of hip-hop's localization (8). Still, *The Global Cipha* is not an ethnographic work but, rather, an overview of current debates about hip-hop as a global phenomenon.

One of most impressive ethnographies on hip-hop culture to date, ethnomusicologist Joseph Schloss' *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (2004) focuses not on any one local scene but on one facet of hip-hop artistry: DJing/producing. Conducting multi-sited fieldwork among what he calls a "nonlocal" community of DJs and beatmakers living in various U.S. cities, Schloss concerns himself with the ethics, aesthetics, and sociality of hip-hop musical production. He makes an excellent case for the utility and in fact the necessity of ethnographic methods for topics such as this, since understanding the inner logic and ethics of hip-hop musical production requires gaining insider knowledge (20). The primary oversight in this study, which Schloss self-consciously acknowledges in his introduction, is attention to race and ethnicity. Schloss justifies this omission because his informants rarely self-identify in racial terms, designating themselves more in terms of what they do than who they are in terms of racial or ethnic ascription. But one of Schloss' most interesting findings is the ethnnoracial diversity of the American DJ community, which he describes as mixed between African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and whites (200). Still, he relegates this finding to a footnote, and does not further assess DJing's cross-racial appeal.

Finally, in the work that most closely parallels my own, cultural anthropologist Anthony Kwame Harrison studies the contours of Bay Area hip-hop in *Hip-Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (2009). Harrison bases his research within an area he characterizes in the first page of his book as "one of the most

racially diverse hip hop scenes in the world": San Francisco (2009:1). Unique in the entire body of ethnographic literature on hip-hop—and indeed unusual in hip-hop scholarship as a whole—Harrison places at the center of his analysis interracial relations beyond merely black and white. More specifically, he highlights how both African Americans and non-African Americans negotiate, interpret, and claim personal and cultural "authenticity" in a cultural formation that so clearly places high value on being "real," "legit," "true," etc. In order to do so, he focuses entirely on one of two fundamental "camps" of Bay Area hip-hop, which he characterizes, like Marcyliena Morgan, as the "underground" (but which I refer to more frequently as the "backpacker" sphere.[3]) Harrison correctly identifies this "underground" scene as far more racially diverse than its antipode, the "hardcore" hip-hop realm, which includes the hyphy movement as well as "gangster," "thug," and "street" rap genres and is marked much more as a space of blackness. He describes the "underground" as a realm where "racial heterogeneity appears to be the ideal" (6) and deftly parses the "colorblind" ideology espoused by some members of this community, particularly whites. Many of Harrison's insights about the complexities of non-black participation in "underground" hip-hop parallel my own, which I detail in Chapters Four and Six. However, by exploring the racial dynamics within and between the "underground"/"backpacker" *and* the "hardcore"/hyphy camps, I hope to capture those complexities in even greater contradistinctive detail.

[3] I deliberately choose the term "backpacker" over "underground" because it is less ambiguous. It helps distinguish this "camp" of the local scene from its converse, "hardcore" hip-hop (a.k.a. "gangster" or "thug" rap), whose artists also sometimes identify as "underground" given their location outside the corporate music mainstream.

Hip-Hop, History, and Place

Within the substantial body of hip-hop scholarship, the inattention to the importance of place from an ethnographic point of view is surprising given that one could hardly talk about hip-hop's origins and history without reference to specific places—two urban locales in particular: the Bronx and South Central Los Angeles. In some of the most influential early writings on hip-hop, these places figure prominently. In her pioneering work *Black Noise* (1994), Tricia Rose situates hip-hop within the social context in which it evolved, focusing particularly on its birthplace, New York's South Bronx in the 1970s. In this comprehensive study, Rose makes the case that hip-hop culture—rapping, DJing, breaking, and graffiti art—emerged as a creative, ingenious response to the devastating effects of deindustrialization, urban blight, white flight, and "urban renewal" projects in New York's poorest borough that relegated youth of color to the city's social margins. Similarly, in his groundbreaking essay "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics" (1996), Robin D.G. Kelley connects the development of "gangsta rap" in the late 1980s with L.A.'s dystopic postindustrial landscape and the city's draconian law-enforcement policies, rooted in the repressive state apparatus of the Reagan and Bush administrations.

Since the publication of Kelley and Rose's studies in the mid-1990s, scholars have continued to favor the method of cultural history and repeat Rose's claims about hip-hop's ingenuity and oppositional value for blacks in white-supremacist U.S. society. As testament to Rose's influence, a recent academic book that is similarly ambitious in scope—since it attempts to cover hip-hop's entire thirty-plus year history—essentially reworks Rose's thesis, only from a musicological perspective. Cheryl Keyes' *Rap Music*

and Street Consciousness (2002) locates the roots of hip-hop, similarly to Rose, in the musical and verbal-art traditions of the black Diaspora: griot orators and storytellers, Jamaican sound systems, African-American speech play and poetic arts, and the blues, jazz, soul, and funk sounds of the twentieth century.

An ethnomusicologist, Keyes examines in great detail the distinctively musical elements of hip-hop, providing useful insight into the art of sampling and DJing and the technologies of hip-hop production (drum machines, electronic mixers, etc.). Although she exhibits technical knowledge of music theory that few hip-hop scholars possess, she does not apply her training in field-oriented ethnographic methods to this project, which is basically an historical overview of the rap-music sound with minimal discussion of its regional, site-specific manifestations. To her credit, she identifies important geographic trends beyond the well-trodden hip-hop territories of New York and Los Angeles—in Atlanta, Miami, Houston, and Oakland—but includes mention of these localized scenes somewhat tangentially.

Another fairly recent publication, Adam Krims' *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000), also tackles hip-hop from a musicological perspective. Less focused on history, Krims analyzes the sonic structures of rap music in greater detail than any publication to date. He is the first to take on the subject of hip-hop within the still heavily traditionalist discipline of musicology, which primarily emphasizes classical rather than popular music studies. He accomplishes the difficult task of connecting formal and aesthetic elements with their social context of emergence—again, urban alienation and the black vernacular tradition—solidifying his claims with concrete musical evidence

rather than tenuous "armchair" assertions that take the connection between the sonic and the social for granted.

A key and extremely useful conceptualization in Krims' work is his notion of the "hip-hop sublime," the mode in which rap artists create a sense of "rawness" or street authenticity through dissonant musical textures and timbres. This goes far in explaining why much rap music intuitively "sounds 'menacing' or 'aggressive,' quite apart from the lyrical content" (2000:74). By examining the sonic, it becomes apparent that hip-hop's subaltern, subversive characteristics inhere both in form (musical structures) and content (lyrics and visual-performative elements). Vocally, rappers deploy audacious, irreverent signifying practices with African roots; tonally and rhythmically, rap producers organize sound in ways that defy Anglo-normative musical notation and measurement—a reworking, again, of Rose's symbolic-resistance thesis but with much added insight.

Like the aforementioned works, I examine the ways in which hip-hop poetics and practices exist as both a reflection *of* and an active response *to* the urban environment surrounding it. I simply shift focus from New York and L.A.—the two dominant poles of the rap industry and mainstream U.S. media production in general—to an equally generative if financially more marginal region. This ethnography also diverges from academic studies positing hip-hop as the product of some abstracted postindustrial inner-city—the vague terrain invoked by scholars describing hip-hop in generalized terms, as "ghetto youth culture." In focusing on the cities and suburbs that comprise the San Francisco Bay Area, I actually want to ground this discussion—to re-territorialize it, in a sense—in the particularities of a specific, geographically delineated sphere in order to more closely consider how social environments affect cultural expression and vice versa.

Although research on hip-hop poetics has proliferated in the days since Rose and Kelley published their early works, the importance of place in hip-hop has received little attention, with rare exception. As mentioned previously, works that examine the local and the global aspects of rap music are part of a growing trend in hip-hop scholarship, which increasingly locates its subject on non-American terrain. The collection of essays entitled *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (2001) is the seminal text so far, covering the hip-hop phenomenon in far-reaching locales, including Canada, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Polynesia. Many essays focus on minority groups within those regions, such as Basques in Spain, Muslims in France, Maoris in New Zealand, and West Indians in Britain. The compilation's organizing thesis, articulated by editor Tony Mitchell in the introduction, is that global hip-hop cannot be understood simply in terms of the mimicking or appropriating of an American cultural form; hip-hop outside the U.S. is indigenized yet syncretic, combining mainstream mass-mediated styles with local and traditional culture. Mitchell asserts that hip-hop has "taken root" in numerous worldwide settings, moving from "an adoption to an adaptation of U.S. musical forms and idioms" (11).

Murray Forman's *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (2002) is one of few works that examine questions of locality in U.S. hip-hop. Forman argues there has been an "intensification of spatiality" in hip-hop discourse since the emergence of West Coast gangsta rap in the late 1980s, an era in which emphasis shifted from generalized "ghetto" landscapes to specific "'hoods" which then became the locus of authenticity for rappers (179). This shift from the ghetto to the 'hood represents to Forman a broader move from generalizations of space to the particularities of place.

Whereas earlier rap lyrics "conceiv[ed] of the ghetto landscape as a generalized abstract construct, as *space*…[t]he terminology of the 'hood…introduced a localized nuance to the notion of space that conveys a certain proximity, effectively capturing a narrowed sense of *place*" (191).

One of the most interesting aspects of Forman's argument is his insight that locality became more important precisely at the moment in which rap music went global, becoming one of the most popular and widely circulating music genres in the world. The "discursive and thematic intensification of 'hood-oriented imagery and a fierce attention to the locality of artists and their labels [was] amplified, made more public precisely on account of the enhanced and unprecedented access to the mainstream commercial mediascape among black-owned independent rap labels and rap artists" (280). He briefly mentions how rap producers in Oakland, in addition to Compton and other areas of South Central L.A., played an important role in the profusion of 'hood discourses during this period (193). Beyond a rather cursory examination of new regional rap scenes in the American South, however (in addition to the rather perplexing inclusion of Seattle, a far less significant production node than the Bay Area), Forman forgoes sustained, detailed analysis of hip-hop's distinctiveness in varying cities and locales.

I contend that the best way to examine the importance of place in hip-hop is, rather obviously, to go out those places and ask people about it; to spend time in the cities, sidewalks, clubs, home studios, and youth centers where hip-hop happens. Journalists seem to understand this fact, "hitting the pavement" when necessary to land interviews and observe hip-hop culture *in situ* (Banjoko 2004; Chang 2005; Cross 1994; George 1998; Kitwana 2002; Morgan 1999; Tate 1992; Toop 1984). In contrast,

academics seem either oblivious to or avoidant of the fact, instead relying primarily on the tried-and-true research methods cultural studies: either quasi-literary analyses of hip-hop texts (musical recordings, hip-hop films, music videos) or cultural histories that trace the modes of rap music production, distribution, and reception within generalized publics and across unspecified urban terrain.

I am in no way dismissing such work. In fact, some of the most significant articulations about hip-hop and the politics of representation—about the relationship between popular music and race, class, and gender—have taken the form either of cultural history (Asante 2008; Keyes 2002; Potter 1995; Rose 1994) or textual/performance analysis (Bradley 2009; Cobb 2007; Gaunt 2006, Krims 2000; Ogbar 2008; Pough 2004). But the kinds of evidence such analyses can generate to support broad claims about how hip-hop matters are limited, reliant either on scholars' own subjective (sometimes insufficiently positioned) readings of texts or from archival or anecdotal accounts. Such methods are for the most part insufficient to the task of evaluating popular culture as lived practice in the current historical moment, since they offer largely conjectural arguments about the everyday uses of hip-hop among actual living social actors. As a result, speculations as to the everyday on-the-ground uses of hip-hop tend to take on the quality of "armchair" analysis. Taking a place-based, ethnographic approach raises different questions and yields different results from macro analyses of hip-hop that do not attend to its regional and local manifestations.

Hip-Hop and Race

By and large, the vast majority of scholars looking at hip-hop *writ large*, as a global phenomenon, stress its continuity within a set of deterritorialized, Diasporic African and African-American verbal-art traditions: speech-play acts such as signifyin', testifying, and toasting; griot storytelling; trickster or "baadman" narratives; polyrhythmic drumming and call-and-response musical patterning, for example—all of which are well-documented as historical antecedents of hip-hop culture (Abrahams 1964; Gates 1988; Folb 1980; Labov 1972; Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Morgan 2002; Smitherman 1986). This thesis is as much evident in early works by Rose (1994), Kelley (1996) and Russell Potter (1995) as it is in more recent studies by Gwendolyn Pough (2004), Cheryl Keyes (2002), Kyra Gaunt (2006), Halifu Osumare (2007), Imani Perry (2004), Jelani Cobb (2007), and H. Samy Alim (2006). My aim is not to contest this assertion, but to add to the body of knowledge about one of the most significant cultural inventions of the twentieth century by exploring hip-hop's racial and stylistic heterogeneity and its regional specificity. Focusing on the particular enables me to move beyond familiar and now somewhat rote critiques hip-hop culture drawn along the axis of authenticity-vs.-cooptation. Within this schema (proffered by academics and lay critics alike) hip-hop is either 1) a symbolic form of resistance by inner-city African-American youth who draw from Afro-Diasporic expressive traditions to contest the alienating conditions of postindustrial white-supremacist society or 2) a commodity form stripped from its grassroots vernacular origins that today works better to reinforce rather contest dominant ideologies of misogyny, racism, homophobia, and hyper-materialism.

One important factor this thesis obscures is the hip-hop nation's multiracial, pan-ethnic composition—one of its most understudied features. Most debates about interracial relations within hip-hop boil down reductively to the issue of black ownership versus white appropriation. (Asante 2008; Baldwin 2004; Kitwana 2005; Samuels 2004; Tanz 2007; Wimsatt 2001) As a result of such polarized fixations, the specter of the Caucasian b-boy—with his side-cocked baseball cap and saggy FUBUs—haunts discussions of hip-hop's future.[4] He embodies at once real fears that suburban schoolboys and white-collar corporate types will finally and completely wrest hip-hop from its African-American parent culture, much like what occurred when rock and roll became deracinated from its black blues origins (George 2003; Ward 1998; Phinney 2005). On the other hand, he represents a kind of rhetorical straw man, an easy whipping boy for pent-up racial anxieties and anger that inhibit more nuanced conversations about multiracialism in hip-hop.

This black-white discursive binary hardly captures the complex demography of hip-hop, particularly in the Bay Area, where African Americans, whites, Asians, Latinos, and Islanders all put their root down on the same dance floors. Foregrounding the kaleidoscopically diverse Bay Area scene necessitates grappling with hip-hop's multiracialism—a fact long avoided or evaded in the majority of studies. On the latter count, I find current academic theories on race somewhat inadequate to the task. The following analysis draws from previous scholarship examining race and ethnicity as

[4] Whites in the U.S. are, in fact, the largest consumers of rap music (Watkins 2005:96). Hip-hop intellectuals—"organic" and otherwise—often cite high levels of rap-music consumption among young whites as cause for alarm—a harbinger of cooptation to come. But this fact should hardly seem startling considering whites comprise nearly three-quarters of the overall U.S. population, and rap is now as ubiquitous a form of American popular music as rock and roll.

meaningful categories of experience and identity as well as the source of numerous societal anxieties that manifest in terms of pervasive and insidious structural inequalities—what Michael Omi and Howard Winant would call "racial projects" (1986) and Lila Abu-Lughod refers to as "differentiating systems" (1991). Certainly critical race theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas 1996; Delgado & Stefancic 1999; Harrison 1998), African-American studies (Dent 1992; Gates 1988; hooks 1992; West 1993), Mexican-American studies (Gaspar de Alba 2003; Limón 1994; Perez 1999; Sandoval 2000; Saldívar 1997), Asian and subaltern studies (Guha 1997; Prashad 2000; Said 1978; Spivak 1988; Wu 2002), and black feminist thought (Bobo 2001; Collins 1990; James & Sharpley-Whiting 2000) offer important insights, particularly those pertaining to the interrelation between multiple axes of domination: race, class, gender, sexuality. Yet this project requires thinking about race beyond binary terms—black/white but also sameness/difference, self/other, subject/object, and conqueror/colonized—to conceptualize a sociocultural formation organized around affective alliances and relational, variegated points of affinity. After all, hip-hop is fundamentally an affective entity that cannot easily be reduced to common descriptors for social aggregates (such as race, ethnicity, [sub]culture, or community) any more easily than it can be collapsed into narrow cultural designations (like music genre, art form, niche market, trend, fad, or style). It must instead be understood as a diffuse cultural formation that traverses racial differences and binds people through shared discourses, texts, symbols, rituals, practices, artifacts, and imaginaries. It nevertheless remains enmeshed in the hegemonic American discourses and racial hierarchies out of which it emerged.

Again, by and large scholarly works on U.S. hip-hop stress its continuity within Afro-Diasporic verbal-art and vernacular traditions and formulate hip-hop's cultural politics in terms of black youths' symbolic resistance to the alienating conditions of late capitalism—more specifically, to the pernicious paring of neoliberal economic regimes and neoconservative social policies from the Reagan through Bush eras that produced a dire state of affairs in working-class urban areas: pervasive unemployment, decaying public schools, emaciated social service programs, re-entrenched racial segregation, and increased youth criminalization (Alim 2006; Asante 2008; Bradley 2009; Gaunt 2006; Kelley 1996; Kelley 1997; Keyes 2002; Krims 2000; Morgan 2009; Osumare 2007; Perry 2004; Potter 1995; Pough 2004; Rose 1994). These structural inequalities affect the life chances not only of African-American young adults but other minority youth who jointly occupy economically vulnerable inner- and "edge"- city zones (Garreau 1992; Soja 2000). Although this produces a fraught set of social relations in which racial and ethnic groups compete for scant resources with fewer and fewer "safety net" entitlements available, it also produces a social sphere in which young people of varying racial ascriptions confront similar challenges and share parallel desires. Given a comparable set of conditions helped spawn hip-hop in the multiracial milieu of the Bronx in the 1970s (Rose 1994; Chang 2005), it is hardly surprising that hip-hop culture would thrive in the interracial "contact zones" (Pratt 1999) of contemporary urban America, particularly the exceptionally diverse Bay Area, where African Americans, Latinos, and Asians commonly inhabit overlapping and contiguous cityspace.

In foregrounding multiracialism, I do not necessarily want to detract from the notion that rap music is a "black thing" or undercut the sense of pride and proprietorship

felt by many African Americans toward hip-hop as a whole. Undoubtedly, many of the aesthetic and expressive practices associated with hip-hop are deeply rooted in African-American culture, just as the majority of the most prominent rap artists are African-American males. But African-American men are not the only individuals making passionate investments in hip-hop culture and contributing to its vitality. I argue that it is the defining aesthetic of an entire generation, crossing barriers of race, class, gender, ethnicity, language, and nation. It is best understood as a global cultural phenomenon and the world's most popular youth-cultural form.

Latinos and Hip-Hop

As a case study on multiracialism and pan-ethnicity in hip-hop, I focus extensively on the experiences of Latinos, particularly on Mexican Americans, who comprise the majority of Latinos in the Bay Area as well as the U.S. as a whole. The majority of academic works on U.S. hip-hop, however, have elided the longstanding involvement of Latinos in hip-hop culture. I view this scholarly elision as increasingly untenable, particularly in discussions of urban youth culture in West Coast cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland, whose so-called "ghettos," "barrios," and "'hoods" exist today as ethnoracial "heterotopias" (Foucault 1986; Soja 1996) where African Americans and Chicanos inhabit the same spaces and influence each other culturally.

Typically, hip-hop scholars refer to this fact tangentially, conceding to Latino participation by repeatedly employing add-on descriptors such as "black *and brown* youth" and "African-American *and Hispanic* youth" without fully extending the

discussion to examine in-depth the role of Latinos (much less that of other racial and ethnic groups such as Asians and Pacific Islanders). The best-known studies that do acknowledge Latinos in rap music focus primarily on East Coast-based artists who are primarily of Puerto Rican and Afro-Caribbean descent (del Barco 1996; Flores 1994; Flores 1996; Flores 2000; Rivera 2003; Rivera, Marshall, & Pacini Hernandez 2009), and primarily utilize the well-worn method of cultural historiography. U.S. Latinos of Central American and South American heritage receive little attention, as do Chicanos—a staggering oversight given Mexican Americans comprise nearly 70 percent of all Latinos in the U.S.

Few thoroughgoing analyses exist of Chicanos' involvement in hip-hop, with the exception of a handful of academic essay (Alvarez 2007; Delgado 1998; Kelly 1993; McFarland 2002; Pérez-Torres 2006; Rodriguez 2003) and one book-length work, Pancho McFarland's *Chicano Rap* (2008), which also highlights the issue of locality in hip-hop, but uses content analysis of music lyrics from various regional scenes as its primary method, not the kind of extended ethnographic study I am calling for. Mexican Americans also receive some mention in extended discussions of hardcore rap in Los Angeles (Cross 1993; De Genova 1995; Quinn 2005). One could hardly tell the story of "gangsta" rap in L.A. without discussing the influence of "*cholo*" street style: the creased khakis, lowrider cars, and laid-back beats favored by Chicano youths are an integral component of West Coast rap. Unfortunately, their fundamental role in the emergence of one of the most important hip-hop subgenres is largely erased, rendered marginal by the black-vernacular-continuity thesis, which posits that the symbolic resistance engaged in by hip-hoppers as primarily African American and male.

Hip-Hop and Gender

The growing scholarly literature on hip-hop by female and feminist authors challenges the gender imbalance of such analyses, but largely reiterates the black-vernacular thesis, expanding it to include women (Berry 1994; Davis 1995; Forman 1994; Gaunt 2006; Guevara 1996; Haugen 2003; hooks 1994; Keyes 2000; Pough 2004; Rose 2008; Wallace 1995). The important addition of feminist perspectives to the study of hip-hop, and especially the hypermasculine subgenre of gangster rap, helps elucidate the complexity and vexing contradictions within a cultural form consistently framed as a voice for the subaltern, but one that often simultaneously denigrates women. The earliest works of hip-hop gender critique issue from veteran black feminist cultural critics bell hooks (1994) and Michelle Wallace (1995), who analytically confront misogyny in hardcore rap. Rather than scapegoat black male rappers as somehow pathologically deviant in their ill-informed sexual politics, both hooks and Wallace stress the importance of locating sexism in hip-hop within broader male-dominated U.S. society, in which women remain economically marginalized and low-income African-American women are often blamed for the problems of Black America—and America in general—as "overbearing mothers" and "welfare queens."

In their critiques, neither hooks nor Wallace let rappers completely off the hook, however. They encourage black women to speak out against sexism in rap despite fears of being viewed as divisive voices within the already embattled African-American community. Younger third-wave black feminists often take a similar tack, highlighting their conflict between loving hip-hop and despising its rampant misogyny. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting explores the more troubling aspects of young women's participation in

hip-hop in *Pimps Up, Ho's Down: Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women* (2007), making the case that "hip hop's commercial success [is] heavily dependent upon young black women" (11) due to their role as consumers and fans—noting the emergence of "groupie" culture—as well as their compromised role in the entertainment industry as models and bit-part players in music videos (i.e. "video vixens"). Scholars such as Eisa Davis (1995) and Gwendolyn Pough (2004) take a recuperative approach toward rap music, arguing that, instead of dismissing hip-hop culture, black feminists should leverage it because, in its popularity and pervasiveness, it provides an ideal forum in which to initiate cross-gender dialogue on sexism within the black community. In her book *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (2004), Pough posits hip-hop can be an effective tool for political resistance wielded by both men and women. She characterizes hip-hop culture using the Habermasian notion of the "counterpublic sphere," a sphere of opposition that embraces "the rhetorical practices of Black women participants in Hip-Hop culture [who] 'bring wreck' – that is, moments when Black women's discourses disrupt dominant masculine discourses, break into the public sphere, and in some way impact or influence the United States imaginary" (12).

Recent work by feminist scholars expands discussions of gender and hip-hop from a male-centered focus—what male rappers are saying about women—to examinations about the symbolic and linguistic practices of black females: young women, girls, and even elders. Pough emphasizes the continuity of women rappers' expression within "Black womanist traditions" (appropriating Alice Walker's phrase) such as autobiography, political pamphleteering, blues singing, and the verbal-art practices of

"sass" and "talking back." Kyra Gaunt, in *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* (2006) makes similar claims about the connection for African-American young women between rap music and longstanding cultural traditions that begin in girlhood. She illustrates how jump-roping, hand-clapping games, and playground cheers all have a strongly rhythmic component from which girls learn to engage musically, and from which young African-American women's passionate investments in hip-hop emerge.

(*Bay) Bridges between Black and White*

Following those arguments, my analysis focuses on the ways Bay Area hip-hop opens up possibilities for multiracial group identity and mixed participation among men, women, and members of varying ethnoracial and socioeconomic groups. At the same time, I examine various contexts in which limits and prohibitions are placed upon such intermixing. In order to understand these shifting racial dynamics, I draw from field-based observations pointing to two distinct "camps" in the local hip-hop scene: the "hardcore" and the "backpacker" spheres. Although no stridently policed line of demarcation exists between the camps, they do operate by contrasting cultural logics that encourage differing levels of involvement among members of various racialized and socially circumscribed groups.

To begin, hardcore hip-hop is marked much more as a space of blackness. Even more importantly, belongingness in the hardcore camp (which includes what is more commonly identified as "gangster rap" as well as, in the Bay Area, the "hyphy" phenomenon) is conferred through class-based identifications with "the 'hood," a space

understood explicitly as synonymous with low-income ghettoized urban neighborhoods. Coming from these places of profound economic marginalization, hardcore hip-hoppers embrace the entrepreneurial aspect of hip-hop, attempting to gain social mobility through involvement in locally based commercial exchange. They place high purchase on "moving units" on the streets as well as moving bodies on the dance floor.

In contrast, "backpackers" measure value and authenticity in terms of adherence to hip-hop's "old school" pre-capitalist forms (e.g. MCing, DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti art), before rap music became incorporated into the corporate mainstream. One's place of origin or experience of social marginality matters less than attaining the requisite knowledge of hip-hop's "roots" and using that knowledge to create and support putatively original, non-formulaic, often politically radical or socially "conscious" work that confounds mainstream tastes and propels the art form forward. Because such authenticating knowledges are acquirable, rather than determined by birthright or phenotype, backpacker adherents run the gamut of ethnoracial backgrounds, from African American to Asian to Latino to Caucasian. Nevertheless, participants skew toward a more affluent set of hip-hop aficionados with a much larger presence of middle-class whites (who, because of their privileged social location, rarely gain entrée into the core hardcore-rap camp).

Such findings bear out an underlying paradox that provides another key focus in this analysis—a paradox that I argue is endemic to hip-hop's cultural politics in the Bay and beyond. It concerns hip-hop's role as an agent of social change. In much current cultural debate, inside the academy and without, hip-hop is often framed as a generationally relevant platform for disenfranchised young people to voice opposition

and advocate for change (Asante 2008; Chang 2005; Kitwana 2002; Ogbar 2007; Watkins 2005). In fact, locally, nationally, and even globally, hip-hop is increasingly enlisted in political mobilizing efforts; I devote much of Chapter Seven to describing such organizing work. But these efforts usually draw from the socially "conscious" strain of backpacker hip-hop, and few of the low-income "at risk" minority youth who are actually targeted by such social-justice work actually identify with it. In the Bay Area, the majority of these young people favor the sounds, aesthetics, and poetics of the "hyphy movement," a local iteration of hardcore hip-hop culture that is undeniably hedonistic, unabashedly commercial, and politically questionable—at least by New Left standards.

Theoretically, I argue that New Left modes of cultural critique, canonized in the neo-Marxian writings of the Birmingham School, contain serious limitations in their ability to illuminate the lived complexities of contemporary popular culture. I refer specifically to the classic Gramscian-influenced studies on British working-class youth by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (1976), Dick Hebdige (1991), and Paul Willis (1977), who maintain that marginalized youth use popular music (as well as other popular styles, artifacts, and practices, from slang to fashion) to imaginatively and symbolically "solve" the problem of their own disenfranchisement; these expressive practices, however, are always precariously empowering because they can either be co-opted and incorporated into the hegemonic corporate mainstream (Hebdige 1991) or aid in the maintenance blue-collar youths' marginal economic status by reaffirming working-class lifestyles (Willis 1977).

These works (and the large body of scholarship they inspired[5]) offer invaluable insights, beginning with one fundamental assertion: that popular culture must necessarily be framed as a site of struggle—as the sphere of entrenched dominant values and competing subaltern interests. Nevertheless, many such studies, particularly those of Hebdige, Willis, and their American cultural-studies counterpart Lawrence Grossberg (1992), contain theoretical assumptions that inhibit thinking on "the popular" as contested terrain and lead to foregone conclusions in which there are always clear winners and losers. Such theoretical enclosures result from 1) an over-reliance on a "transcendent" notion of cultural resistance (Lipsitz 1994:25) in which revolutionary or utopic outcomes are the only valid ones or 2) a totalizing view of hegemony framed in terms of failure or zero-sum gain—i.e. dominative social forces inevitably subsume every transgressive or countercultural act.

While authors may deny it, such ideas are rooted in the Marxian "mass culture" critiques of the Frankfurt School from over a half century ago. They proceed from an implicitly modernist positioning that bemoans the usurpation of culture by industry and longs for a utopic world of pure artistic expression in which both "high art" and "folk" culture exist in an autonomous sphere from commerce, and can thus effectively critique capitalist exploitation from some "outside." Within this schema, hip-hop can only be framed as a periodically oppositional, potentially revolutionary force constantly being

[5] Among the inheritors of the cultural studies tradition who have been influential on my own thinking about popular culture include British scholars Keith Negus (1999), Angela McRobbie (1991), and David Hesmondhalgh (2002), American academics John Fiske (1989), George Lipsitz (1990; 1994), and Herman Gray (1995; 2005), and Australian intellectual Meaghan Morris (1996).

defused and defanged as it undergoes the relentlessly standardizing mechanisms of late capitalism.

Rather than impose “either/or” binary terms upon my subject (such as resistance vs. domination, subaltern vs. hegemonic, authentic vs. co-opted, art vs. commerce, the margins vs. the mainstream), I present the variable, convoluted, even contradictory ways Bay Area hip-hoppers themselves draw their own distinctions as “native” cultural critics or “organic intellectuals.” I place such opposing elements in tension with each other without attempting to reach some sort of tidy Marxian synthesis. This takes me, literally and figuratively, beyond black and white, beyond *a priori* assumptions that hip-hop can only be either insurgent black expression or flexible form of accumulation primarily benefiting white corporate elites.

It is temping to characterize the Bay Area hip-hop scene as that very “outside,” since the “independent” status of its artists is continually touted within the community, and since the majority of its practitioners work largely outside the dominant cultural industries, which enables them to produce works that need not conform to the constraints of mass-marketing schemes. In fact, Bay Area rappers from both the hardcore and backpacker camps continually refer to themselves as members of a proudly “underground” music scene located at some remove from the corporate pressures of New York and L.A., where most multinational music companies are based.

“Underground” is a word used frequently in hip-hop circles (as well as, historically, within other urban subcultures) to describe a realm cultural production that falls below the radar of the majority population and the mainstream media; its artifacts and outputs may circulate across wide terrain among specialized audiences, but they are

not "mass produced" in the strict Fordist sense. As Sarah Thornton explains in *Club Cultures* (1996), her study of electronic music scene in the U.K., being "underground" means attracting only those fans who have the kinds of specialized knowledges—be they local or esoteric or a combination of both—necessary to appreciate a distinct kind of artistic work (or even locate it in the first place). Underground music accrues cultural capital through the creation of a rarified cultural milieu that surrounds it, through the very fact that it is not accessible to everyone. In Thornton's schema,

> the distinction between the "underground" and "the media"…encompasses a series of further contrasts including the esoteric versus the exposed, the exclusive versus the accessible, the pure versus the corrupted, the "independent" versus the "sold out." [U]ndergrounds see themselves as renegade cultures opposed to, and continually in flight from, the colonizing co-opting media. To be "hip" is to be privy to insider knowledges that are threatened by the general distribution and easy access of mass media. Like the mainstream, "*the* media" is therefore a vague moonlight against which subcultural credibilities are measured. (6, emphasis in original)

According to its practitioners, Bay Area hip-hop constitutes its own kind of regional "underground" or subculture that connects up with a broader international hip-hop undergrounds—the realm of obscure LP's, specialty magazines, fan blogs, small clubs, and warehouse parties—through which artists and their work circulate. The ability of Bay Area hip-hop to thrive in spheres somewhat separate from major media and entertainment conglomerates challenges claims about hip-hop's wholesale homogenization as a result of corporate co-optation. However, just because most Bay Area rap attracts primarily a "niche" listener base and travels through underground channels does not mean it exists in some pure anti-capitalist sphere of cultural production. Quite the contrary, when I ask consultants to describe what makes the Bay Area hip-hop scene unique, the one characteristic that comes up as often if not more than

its "independent spirit" and "freaky swagger" is its fervent entrepreneurial ethos or "hustle." Part of the area's repute in hip-hop circles is the high-level of ambition, acumen, and industriousness exhibited by local rappers and the magnitude of street-based commerce that takes place there, beyond the distribution chains of major corporate media. The undeniably business-oriented bent of the "hustler" ethos refutes any notion that "underground" or "independent" hip-hop somehow negates or eschews the profit logic of capitalism.

Bay Area hip-hop unsettles binaries such as authentic-versus-commercial, grassroots-versus-factory-produced, subaltern-versus-hegemonic extant in latent or residual form in many of the best-known analyses of "the popular," even by authors who profess to eschew Frankfurtian dualities. It does not obliterate those categories, however. As is so often the case when studying subcultures or art "in the age of mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin 1968), these are meaningful distinctions among the aficionados, fans, and creative communities whose activities I am tracking here. For Bay Area hip-hoppers they are meaningful in varied, unpredictable, oftentimes surprising ways. My aim is not to impose an outside and overly neat set of theoretical presuppositions upon this community but to show how its members produce their own system of values and aesthetics in which they distinguish between what's good and bad, what's "tight" and what's "wack," and what's "clean" and what's "bootsy" (to use Bay Area slang)—all the while acknowledging how those individuals are operating within contested, fraught terrain, in-filled with competing and contradictory claims. Nevertheless, such distinctions are important because they help social actors define the cultural world they are creating. I hope to produce an ethnographic work that, in the words of cultural anthropologist and

literary scholar Jose Limón, “recognizes and textually renders the disorderly contradictions that often prevail in the world of the dominated rather than ordering them into a 1960s-influenced seamless narrative of resistance” (1994:10); one that also avoids reducing popular culture to the terrain of dupes and the realm of false consciousness.

The seemingly contradictory characterization of Bay Area hip-hop as both proudly countercultural and unapologetically business-oriented generates a productive tension that animates this entire study. The time span covered here, roughly 2000 to 2008, provides a particularly dense and lively illustration of that tension since it encapsulates a tumultuous period in which local hip-hop both became both the most politically charged it had ever been and, shortly thereafter, the most market driven.

This was actually the second boom-and-bust cycle for the Bay, in which regional innovations surfaced briefly into national consciousness and then retreated back into the so-called “underground.” The first occurred in the early 1990s when a number of local rap acts gained mainstream notoriety; they included playful pop performers MC Hammer and Digital Underground as well as the more hardcore “mobb music” of E-40 and the Click, Dru Down, and the Luniz, whose ascendance coincided with (and was indeed related to) the rise of gangster rap in Southern California. By the end of the millennium, most “mobb” musicians moved back into the underground, where they joined the many critically acclaimed “backpacker” and/or “conscious” MCs of the Bay Area such as Paris, the Coup, Hieroglyphics, Blackalicious, and Zion I. Having weathered the “gangsta” era, Bay Area conscious-rap acts over the next few years quietly and steadily garnered a significant following on the college-music circuit and among international (especially

European and Japanese) hip-hop connoisseurs; they remain to this day among the region's most successful recording artists.

It was the existence of this socially conscious pool of "underground" artists that helped fuel the surge in political organizing among young people that came to be known as hip-hop activism or "raptivism" at the turn of the 20th century. Hip-hop activism generally refers to the move among post-Civil Rights or "hip-hop generation" activists[6] to found their own progressive organizations and create grassroots campaigns for social justice using rap music as culturally unifying platform for dissent. This is an organizing trend that cropped up within leftist circles throughout the nation, from L.A. to Chicago to New York to Philadelphia, but was concentrated in the Bay Area. By the middle of the 2000s, despite several significant political victories,[7] this surge had begun to collapse as grassroots energy flagged and organizers began to recognize they had failed to adequately attract and retain involvement among the very demographic whose interests they professed to be most concerned with: poor and working-class young people of color.

A few youth-leadership organizations managed to continue using hip-hop as an empowerment tool for young people, but the beats in the background started to sound a little different from the ones bumping during the "raptivist" phase. For reasons to be explored further in Chapter Three, the style of rap music that began to surface in the Bay

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[6] The "hip-hop generation" is typically defined in concert with the "post-Civil Rights" generation, i.e. individuals born between the mid-'60s and the Reagan era, as the civil-rights dream became a fading memory (Kitwana 2002:xiii)

[7] In New York, one notable victory included a successful mobilization against massive budget cuts to the New York City school system in 2002. This effort was led primarily by the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN), a political and lobbying organization founded by hip-hop impresario Russell Simmons and civil-rights veteran Ben Chavis Muhammad. In the Bay Area, youth activists halted construction of a massive $177 million-dollar juvenile detention center in the East Bay city of Dublin as part of their efforts to mobilize around issues of educational access and juvenile justice.

Area soon after hip-hop activism's 2004 apex—the style that become most relevant to the majority of low-income youth of color—was not overtly political or socially "conscious," much to the dismay of many well-meaning youth mentors. This new sound, which came to be identified as "hyphy" music, was heavy on the booty-shaking bass-and-percussion bottom line—highly danceable beats referred to as "slaps" in local parlance. Melodically, hyphy emphasized catchy but relentlessly repetitive synthesizer riffs, a far cry from the more organic sounding "rare groove" (vintage soul and R&B) samples and funk-band instrumentation more typical in the conscious-rap subgenre. Finally and most importantly, the lyrical content of the typical hyphy song shied away from overtly political themes. Subject matter focused less on issues of community empowerment and more on personal gratification in the form of making money, getting high, having sex, and "wilding out" at impromptu car-stunt exhibitions called "sideshows," made infamous through the sensationalistic television coverage on *Dateline NBC* ("Oakland Cars Gone Wild" 2005) and Fox News' *Hannity & Colmes* (2007).

This is not to say there is no sense of politics to the hyphy movement. Much of the following analysis is devoted to examining the ways in which ludic and seemingly frivolous or "lightweight" pop-cultural formations like hyphy, whose controversial themes fixate primarily on bodily pleasure, material excess, and playful provocation, actually do comment on and critique social realties, albeit in a way that does not easily conform to New Left standards of countercultural resistance. Unlike the more literal counterhegemonic messaging of overtly political rap or other forms of protest music, hyphy's rebelliousness manifests more at the level of poetics, affect, and style. Even the name itself, "hyphy"—explained either as an abbreviation for "hyperactive" or a

condensation of the slang words "hype" and "fly"—connotes a more visceral and visual assertion of difference or subcultural distinction. Hyphy culture emphasizes jittery, angular melodies and spastic dancing—moves described as "going dumb" or "riding the yellow bus" (i.e. body movements of someone requiring Special Education or in some way impaired). Although the trend is rooted in the gritty street rap of Bay Area veteran artists such as E-40, Too $hort, and Mac Dre, the sensibility of hyphy is far less laid back than most West-Coast hardcore rap, which emphasizes masculine coolness and self-mastery. Hyphy, by contrast, urges giddy and exuberant expression, eschewing the need for personal containment and composure. It challenges both white norms of behavior and gangster-rap codes of comportment.

In stark contrast to the social-change agenda of hip-hop activists and conscious rappers, the hyphy movement was an unapologetically commercial effort to unify the local rap scene primarily for marketing and self-promotional purposes—a means for local artists to advance sales and gain access to broader audiences at a time when many of the conventional avenues for mainstream exposure were narrowing due to an overall downturn in the global music industry. Engaging vigorously in self-promotion, hyphy artists attempted to position Bay Area hip-hop as a commercially viable product, the next regional rap style to "blow up" on a national scale. They understood that, just as hip-hop thrives on local difference and a distinctive sense of place, so does the music industry benefit from the proliferation of novel and marketable trends, as evidenced by Southern or "dirty South" rap, which had recently ascended to the top of the charts: first in Atlanta, with its "crunk" and "snap" music, then in Houston, with its "chopped and screwed" sound.

Since the hyphy movement was motivated in large part by an entrepreneurial agenda, it brought with it a heightened sense of tension between the socially conscious and the hyper-capitalist moods of Bay Area hip-hop. But the line of demarcation between hyphy and conscious-rap or "backpacker" crowds was never clearly drawn or stridently policed. Top hyphy rappers such as Mistah FAB lent significant support to activists, shedding visibility upon juvenile-justice reform efforts by performing at consciousness-raising events and contributing to compilation albums devoted to antiviolence messaging. Likewise, prominent backpacker rappers such as Zion I appeared regularly on hyphy-heavy concert bills, attempting to expand its audience beyond the college crowds that conscious hip-hop artists typically attract into harder-to-reach inner-city youth-of-color contingents.

The sense of contrast as well as overlap between these two "camps" of Bay Area rap music provides a useful window through which to explore tensions endemic not only to hip-hop but to popular culture generally. It requires parsing what on the surface appear to be contradictory impulses toward street-based production and local ownership and the desire among regional artists for multinational major-label support and worldwide fame. It requires accounting for intimately localized popular practices created using globally circulating commodified forms. It begs the question: How do you understand popular culture beyond either-or, black-and-white binaries like art vs. commerce, original vs. manufactured , "the folk" vs. "the masses," local vs. global and instead adequately frame it as the "complex, ambivalent and contested" site of social activity that it truly is (Hesmondhalgh 2000:17)?

I purposefully use the phrase "black and white" to suggest there is a racial dynamic at work here, one that underlies the theoretical framework developed within cultural studies, particularly the early studies of subcultures and "the popular" that emerged in the 1970s from Britain's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS, a.k.a. the "Birmingham School"), which influence this project. Looking retrospectively, Birmingham scholar Simon Frith locates British subcultural studies' fixation on working-class youth and resistance in the projections of white, bourgeois male academics (1992:180). He points out that CCCS theorists' choice, typically, of black youth culture and black musical forms represents a desire to valorize the bodily, sensual, "non-serious," hedonistic, and playful characteristics associated with popular music but, more broadly, with "low" culture and the "figure of the African" (180). Such associations are rooted in the legacy of empire and the Enlightenment, from which emerged a set of chauvinist Eurocentric value judgments based on a series of oppositions: high/low, seriousness/sensuality, mind/body, white/black, civilized/primitive, industrial/folk. Within the neo-Marxian framework of cultural studies, however, blackness is no longer denigrated. Rather, it is valorized; it becomes a metonym for all the positive qualities and unalienated experiences that late-capitalist bourgeois society bars:

> The white pop cultural studies obsession with black music (particularly noticeable in Britain) is thus an expression of a yearning for a "natural" (unbourgeois, uncivilized) state of grace. The answer to Kobena Mercer's question ["What is it about white people that makes them want to be black?"] is literally pathetic: *white boys just want to have fun*!" (181)

While characterizing such studies as "pathetic" is perhaps an overstatement, the task at hand is to divest as much as possible from these projections (which will doubtless be aided by the entrance of more women, gays, and people of color into the field) and take

up Frith's call for more ethnographically grounded approaches to popular music studies (1992).

While taking a geographically delimited ethnographic "case study" approach would seem to narrow the scope of this project, it actually enables me to expand the discussion of hip-hop into often-overlooked areas. The Bay Area offers a rich site for the investigation of hip-hop culture because it is distinct—distinct in ways that complicate prevailing assumptions about what hip-hop is and what it does in society. In the following chapters, I will focus on three characteristics that particularly stand out about the local scene: its racial diversity, its politically charged underpinnings, and its commercial independence. These three qualities provide key foci for this analysis, serving as recurring themes throughout each chapter. In Chapter One, I set the historic ground for this highly eclectic regional subculture, tying its existence to a set of preexisting economic, geographic, and cultural circumstances that provide the conditions of possibility for contemporary Bay Area hip-hop, emphasizing the region's longstanding reputation as politically progressive and racially diverse countercultural hotbed. In Chapter Two and Three I grapple with the more "hardcore" orientation of hyphy rap (and its "mobb music" predecessors), wherein hip-hoppers place high import on street knowledge, turf allegiances, black identity, black markets, and materialistic pursuits, yet out of which a surprisingly eccentric and expansive poetic sensibility has emerged that diverges from more conventional gangster or "thug" rap modes of expression. I contrast this with the cultural economy of local "backpacker" hip-hop in Chapter Four, focusing on a core set of values that posit authenticity and "realness" in terms of social awareness and an anti-corporate stance, buttressed by knowledge of rap music's "roots" and an

adherence to "old-school" hip-hop forms, regardless of one's particular racial identity or social location. Chapters Five and Six focus exclusively on the question of race and ethnicity with regard to the experiences of Latinos in both the backpacker and hardcore camps, examining the malleability of racial identity in certain contexts as well as boundaries and limitations placed upon inter-ethnic mixing in hip-hop's oftentimes unpredictable racialized spaces. Chapter Seven returns to the question of "consciousness" in rap music, examining the complicated, tentative ways in which local hip-hop has been enlisted in the support of actual political organizing and youth leadership programs.

By honing in on these seven broad topics, my aim is to highlight the intricacies, complexities, paradoxes, and contradictions in hip-hop culture. In more specific terms, this study illustrates how hip-hop is a vital space for African-American expression, but also a sphere in which Latinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and whites engage with black culture and make their own contributions; how rap music provides the ludic sonic backdrop for countless parties, nightclubs, and street-corner gatherings, but also the soundtrack for social-justice organizing; how hip-hop is a product for sale on the shelves of major corporate retailers, but also a form of artistic practice for young people who in turn produce their own local media. Given the racial as well as the stylistic heterogeneity of the scene, it becomes apparent how it cannot be described in reductive black-and-white terms, literally or figuratively. Instead, it is enveloped in a metaphorical gray space, as dense and murky as the ubiquitous fog hugging the Bay Bridge, the Golden Gate, and the other bridges connecting the ethnically diverse and economically varied enclaves of the Bay Area. It is this hazy space that I try to bring into focus in the following pages.

Notes on Method

This project represents, in the most formal sense, two years of field research in the San Francisco Bay Area spanning from August 2006 to August 2008. I centered my research in Oakland, California, where I resided during the duration of that period. My findings also incorporate knowledge and experience gleaned from over six years covering the local hip-hop scene as a music journalist: from 1998 to 2001, as editor for the arts & entertainment website Citysearch.com and occasional contributor to the *Oakland Tribune* and *San Francisco Examiner*, as well as a period that coincided with (and extended beyond) my dissertation fieldwork, when I wrote about hip-hop for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* alternative-weekly newspaper.

Participant observation, interviewing, and performance analysis are the cornerstones of my research design, enhanced by historical research reflected primarily in the first chapter of this dissertation. Although initially I intended to combine ethnographic methods with more explicitly literary analytical techniques involving close readings of rap lyrics, I found that interviews and direct observations of "live" performances (whether verbal or musical, staged or routine, marked or everyday) yielded such rich and intriguingly ambiguous cultural texts that song-lyric analysis withdrew from focus. The logic of this rests on the fact that I never intended this exegesis to be exclusively about *rap music* per se, but about local manifestations of hip-hop's stylized aesthetics, kinesthetic poetics, and complex cultural politics more broadly.

My primary contexts for conducting direct observation were 1) as an attendee at concerts, dance performances, and nightlife events at various venues, both commercial (concert halls and clubs) and community oriented (youth and cultural centers, arts

nonprofits, college campuses, street fairs, and festivals in public parks); 2) as either a participant in or support-staff member helping coordinate grassroots community programming (hip-hop showcases and exhibitions, celebrations and fundraisers, consciousness-raising workshops, and political rallies); and 3) as an urban "flaneur" (Benjamin 1999) walking the streets of San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley, taking in the sensory stimuli of dense sidewalk-based "public spheres" while patronizing the privatized zones of commerce: the "mom-and-pop" music stores, locally owned urban apparel shops, and even corporate-run shopping malls where young hip-hoppers converge, and where so much cultural traffic occurs.

In addition to taking extensive field notes, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a total of 43 participants in both individual and groups settings, all of which I audio recorded. In parsing notes and interview responses, I employed interpretive methods after organizing this "data" using a fairly systematic thematic coding system. Key themes that emerged centered around issues of social location and identity (i.e. family background, interpellations in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, generation, and region), taste and aesthetics, stylistic distinctions (especially between "backpacker" vs. "hardcore" hip-hop), notions of authenticity, political views, institutional encounters, opinions about the music industry and the mass media, and open-ended ruminations about the uniqueness of Bay Area hip-hop.

The majority of interviewees are hip-hop artists—mostly rappers/MCs (29) but also DJs/music producers (7), vocalists (3), dancers (2), and visual artists (2). Several play behind-the-scenes roles as record-label entrepreneurs and managers (4). Some contribute to the hip-hop community as writers (i.e. journalists and poets) (4), radio

personalities and programmers (3), and mentors at nonprofits utilizing hip-hop arts programming (14). Others are themselves participants in those programs (11). In many cases, roles overlap: MCs are also DJs, artists are also entrepreneurs, mentors are also artists, and so on. In nearly every case, when I refer to consultants I use either their actual names or stage monikers, not pseudonyms. Given so many of my consultants are performers or otherwise "public" presences within this artistic community—a community in which "publicity" is a valued form of cultural capital—almost no one requested anonymity. I even assisted in "publicizing" artists' work in a number of cases by writing articles about them in the local press. I figured this went some way toward reciprocating what they offered me as collaborators to my project while at the same time shedding light on emergent talent.

In terms of the demographics of my interviewee sample, 25 identify as African American, 4 as white, 3 as mixed race, 13 as Latino, and 4 as Asian. Twenty eight are men and fifteen are women. They span a wide age range, from 16-year-olds to forty-something veterans of the hip-hop industry—a testament to the staying power of a cultural formation once thought to be a "fad." Overall I believe this sample is fairly representative of the demographics of the Bay Area scene broadly, a scene that in some ways conforms to general assumptions about hip-hop being African-American and male dominant but nevertheless includes an unusually large presence of people from diverse backgrounds. If anything, Asians and whites are underrepresented here, while Latinos may be slightly overrepresented; the latter is purposeful, given that I devote two chapters of this work to examining the experiences of Latino hip-hoppers as a kind of "case study" on race relations.

I took a less-than-systematic approach to approaching consultants. Some I contacted through the digital version of "cold calling"—either emailing people whose work I was familiar with, and who had their contact information posted online, or sending messages to them through the social networking site Myspace.com. In a few cases, I solicited interviewees through Craigslist.com, the ubiquitous free online classifieds website. (I used this tactic early on in my project in order to "jump start" the process and make contacts in outlying and suburban areas less familiar to me in my years as a Bay Area resident and journalist, such as San Jose and Vallejo.)

Some of my most helpful consultants were people I did not formally interview but who I became acquainted with while volunteering and/or doing part-time work at Youth UpRising (YU), a youth-development organization in East Oakland whose members provided me with an essential point of entrée into the working-class communities of color they serve, where regional hip-hop has historically flourished. Serving at YU in various capacities—as a volunteer, a part-time employee, and a writing contractor/consultant—allowed me to make contacts I would never have been able to establish without the access granted to me through the organization's staff, many of whom are East Oakland natives themselves. YU has done a remarkable job forging relationships and building "street credibility" in a rough part of town where many residents are justifiably skeptical of outsiders, given generations of neglect, disinvestment, stigmatization, and sensationalism leveled against their neighborhoods by outsiders: public officials, journalists, business developers, and likely more than a few social scientists. I hope I have done a reasonable job at dispelling some of those misgivings by representing this community fairly and with compassion.

Chapter One

Setting the Music Scene

"The Bay Area" is, admittedly, a large geographical frame within which to organize an ethnographic project. Given, as Murray Forman (2002) rightly points out, the intensified sense of place and territoriality in contemporary hip-hop, one could reasonably focus ethnographic attention on one city or even one neighborhood in the region; turf identification is so ardent and specific in the Bay (particularly in Oakland) that it is common to see young people at local rap concerts throw up hand signals representing their 'hood or even their block (a practice narrowly identified by law enforcement as evidence of gang affiliation, which is not necessarily the case). But reducing the frame of this ethnography by focusing solely on Oakland or San Francisco or one neighborhood therein would require filtering out the ways in which both cities relate to each other; how resident hip-hop "heads" (the term used to describe enthusiasts and aficionados) draw contrasts between the two cities in order to define the distinctive urban flavor of each; how those same residents emphasize connections between nearby cities, towns, and suburbs to construct a shared regional culture. Likewise, focusing on the even more micro-spatial dimension of neighborhoods or blocks would risk obscuring the relationship of those smaller fields to broader urban terrain and cultural dynamics affecting the entire region. Such an approach is more likely to reify an inaccurate sense of urban enclaves as isolated, wholly contained "villages" within a city, a tendency in early urban anthropology rightly criticized today within the discipline (Clifford 1997; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Passaro 1997).

Although many individuals consulted in this study cite the specificities and place-markers of their neighborhoods and blocks as meaningful categories in their lives, when they talk about hip-hop they usually broaden the discussion up to the Bay Area as a distinctive musical community. Just as they view their local music scene as part of a wider regional culture, so too do they view themselves in that way: most reported moving from town to town within the region at least once in their lives, oftentimes due to displacement resulting from the gentrification of their neighborhoods (especially in the case of those born in San Francisco) or as a result of intra-regional labor migration, as their families sought social mobility in different municipalities. In keeping with the trajectories of my consultants' lives, I conducted multi-sited research throughout the region, basing my efforts in Oakland (where I lived during my primary field work period, from August 2006 to August 2008) but expanding out to include additional participant observation and interviewing in San Francisco, San Jose, Berkeley, and a few Bay Area small cities and suburbs, including Santa Rosa, El Cerrito, and Fairfield. Including multiple, contrasting, even competing sites within the purview of this ethnography allows me to better translate the dynamic sense of place local hip-hoppers construct, rather than naturalize it as homogenous or static.

In order to capture the migratory, multi-nodal sense of place permeating regional rap and hip-hop, it is necessary to talk about the Bay Area as a polycentric "postmetropolis." Urban theorist Edward Soja develops the term "postmetropolis" to describe the decentering of contemporary cityspace and the resultant transformation of urban social relations (2000). As a theoretical model for contemporary urbanity, the postmetropolis contrasts sharply from the idealized explanations of the modern industrial

metropolis posited by thinkers in the "Chicago School" of urban sociology, whose work emerged in the 1920s and 1930s and remained dominant several decades later. Chicago School social scientists such as Ernest Burgess and Robert Park described cities in organicist terms; cities evolved like natural organisms, rooted by a central business district (CBD) at the core, which supported an expanding residential and suburban periphery. The modern metropolis followed a concentric-circle pattern of growth, in which the working classes dwelled in row houses and tenements in the "inner rings," close to the industrial center, while elites built homes in tonier outer areas. Core and periphery areas related to each other in an orderly, coherent, and harmonious relationship, as parts of a holistic, quasi-ecological system. (It is no coincidence that Chicago School theorists referred to their work as "urban ecology.") Within this organicist framework, class conflict and power struggles were downplayed in favor of rational-behavioralist explanations for human interaction (Soja 2000:88).

The depoliticized approach of the Chicago School diverged sharply from influential early works on urbanization—namely, Freidrich Engels' 19th-century study of Manchester, England. Framing Manchester as the classic industrial metropole, Engels emphasized "the factory system and the capital-labor relation as underlying forces in the organization of cityspace…the deep structural dualism of capital versus labor, the (urban) bourgeoisie versus the (urban) proletariat" (Soja 2000:88). In the 1970s, neo-Marxist thinkers such as David Harvey (1973) and Manuel Castells (1979) began to bring the sense of power dynamics back into their theorizations of the city. But by the time their work emerged, the economic and cultural landscape of urban spaces had shifted radically since the days of the Chicago School (and even more profoundly so since Marx and

Engels' day). Cities now functioned under what Harvey identified as a "condition of postmodernity" (1989), a key characteristic of which being the deindustrialization of urban cores as a result of manufacturing job flight (typically to cheaper overseas labor markets). Referred to alternately as "late capitalism," "post-industrialism," "post-Fordism," or "flexible accumulation," this new global economic system dramatically transformed the structure of cities. The majority of older "Rustbelt" metropolises in the eastern United States confronted blight and abandonment within emptied-out central business districts while newer "Sunbelt" cities in the west developed in sprawling, fragmented, decentered patterns accordant with the postmodern age.

Taking these profound structural changes into account, intellectuals such as Harvey, Castells, and, later, Saskia Sassen (1991) provided a useful vocabulary with which to rethink contemporary cityspace (the "postmodern" city, the "informational city," and the "global city" being their chief conceptual abstractions, respectively). Whereas their work focused primarily on the financial citadels of New York, London, and Tokyo, one of Soja's primary contributions was to help shift the focus in urban studies to the U.S. West Coast, where he and his colleagues in the "L.A. School" of cultural geography were based. Los Angeles figures prominently in the work of Soja and L.A. School thinkers such as Mike Davis (1990; 1998; 2001), Michael Dear (2002), and Steven Flusty (2002). In their writings, L.A. stands as a representative model of postmodern urbanity—not the peculiar exception others urban scholars had previously regarded it as. In analyzing L.A., these writers claim all the major tendencies in late-capitalist cityspace are evident, if not unusually pronounced. Soja summarizes those tendencies in *Postmetropolis* thusly: major economic activity (industrial production, the

“FIRE” sector of finance, insurance, and real estate) no longer transpires in the CBD but in many cases “reterritorializes” in the urban periphery, as large office buildings and manufacturing companies surface in suburban or “edge city” areas, which no longer resemble the white-picket-fence “crabgrass frontier” of the Eisenhower era (Soja’s “exopolis”); racial and ethnic demographics shift radically, with massive influxes of immigrant groups seeking work in those reindustrialized zones as well as the massive U.S. service-sector economy (Soja’s “cosmopolis”); within this newfound diversity, racial inequality and class antagonisms intensify as minority groups are further marginalized by low-wage jobs and residence in *de facto* segregated neighborhoods in both inner- and edge-city areas (Soja’s “fractal city”); methods of policing and surveillance become more elaborate as authorities seek to contain populations and quell social antagonisms through new mechanisms of social control (Soja’s “carceral city”).

Like Greater Los Angeles, the Bay Area is a West Coast seaport region undergoing the global-economic processes of deindustrialization and decentralization. Nevertheless, urban anthropologists and cultural geographers have studied the region far less comprehensively, with most contemporary studies emerging from applied-research fields such as urban and regional planning, public policy, and environmental design. While analysis on the scale of Soja’s and Davis’ work on L.A. is beyond the scope of this project, an initial framing of the Bay Area in similar analytical terms goes far in explaining the region’s unique social, economic, and cultural landscape which sets the conditions for possibility for local hip-hop.

First and foremost, the San Francisco Bay Area is a sprawling, decentered, postmetropolis on par with “Greater Los Angeles,” the five-county geographical unit of

analysis taken up by the L.A. School.[8] Like Greater L.A., the Bay Area encompasses numerous counties—nine, to be exact: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma, all of which encircle a large marine estuary known as the San Francisco Bay. The sprawling 7,000 square-mile metropolitan area includes three major cities—San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose—as well as dozens of smaller suburbs and exurbs. In square mileage and population density, the Bay Area is actually less than half the size of Greater L.A. Though comparatively compact, people tend to identify with the Bay Area in more diffuse terms than they do in L.A. Unlike the many denizens of Southern California who, whether they live in Irvine or Inglewood, often use the expansive place-name of "Los Angeles" to signify their hometown, Bay Area residents more commonly call a specific city or town within the region home. They locate themselves within the Bay Area primarily when addressing outsiders who would not recognize place names such as Hayward or Redwood City. Accordantly, in the hip-hop community MCs often name-check specific hometowns in individual songs but they broaden their geographical self-ascription to the regional level in conversations with outsiders (especially the music press), when they want to assert the significance of their local music scene as both sizeable and distinctive.

Despite the fractured geography and diverse demographics of the region, the Bay Area coalesces through shared cultural, social, economic, and infrastructural ties. Politically, the city of San Francisco garners worldwide attention for being ultra-liberal,

[8] As evidence of that these scholars view L.A. in geographically broader terms than the City of Los Angeles or even the two-county Los Angeles "metropolitan area," recall in *City of Quartz* Mike Davis' pointed rumination on his hometown of Fontana, an outlying "post-suburban" city in San Bernardino County the author describes as a "junkyard of dreams" (1990; see Chapter 7).

but left-leaning attitudes permeate the entire region. Oakland and Berkeley actually surpass San Francisco's unusually high percentage of Democratic voters. Another common regional denominator is the elaborate highway and transit system—conduits that transport a massive, migratory local workforce in and between the different cities and towns that comprise the area.[9] As in Los Angeles and California more generally, car culture is a fundamental aspect of Bay Area life. Residents rely heavily on automobile transportation, as they have done since the construction of the region's massive freeway system in the 1950s. The resultant high levels of traffic and highway congestion stand as a frustrating aspect of daily functioning for commuters and a key problem for environmental activists.[10] At the same time, car customization forms an integral component of local youth culture, from the Japanese import scene of Asian Americans[11] in the South Bay to the longstanding lowrider tradition of local Chicanos in the San Francisco Mission District to the "scraper" phenomenon of Oakland's hyphy movement. (The latter will be further discussed in Chapter Three.)

More so than the automobile, however, the seven bridges that traverse the San Francisco Bay offer a perfect expression of the connective ties that make regional mobility and cohesion possible. The most famous and heavily trafficked of those trans-bay passages, the Golden Gate and the Bay Bridge connect San Francisco with points outward: with affluent Marin County in the case of the former and with the blue-collar

[9] For further reading on transportation systems in the Bay Area, see the work of Robert Cervero (1998), Professor of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley.

[10] The Bay Area has always been at the vanguard of the environmental movement. For a history of environmental politics in the region, see Richard A. Walker's *The Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area* (2008).

[11] See Soo Ah Kwon, "Autoexoticizing: Asian American Youth and the Import Car Scene," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7:1, Feb. 2004.

city of Oakland in the case of the latter. San Francisco remains the region's most recognizable city to outsiders; it is, in fact, one of the world's top tourist destinations, attracting visitors from around the world with its world-class cultural institutions, attractive Victorian architecture, and old-world aesthetics. Widely regarded as "the most European-like city in the United States" (J. Rodriguez 1999:11), San Francisco contrasts sharply with the concrete-and-asphalt sprawl of Los Angeles—a fact locals point out with pride. Confined within a small seven-by-seven square-mile tip of a coastal peninsula, the city developed vertically rather than horizontally, with towering skyscrapers, stylish multi-story condominiums, and an impressive skyline that rivals New York's. Tourists are not the only ones impressed by San Francisco's compact grandeur. Bay Area locals refer to it simply as "the city," suggesting its dominant status in relation to other cities in the region. Along a similar vein, Oaklanders refer to their city simply as "tha town," connoting a defiant awareness of San Francisco's perceived economic and cultural superiority while countering that bias by suggesting Oakland is where the real "folks" live—the "everyday people" that Oakland funk legends Sly & the Family Stone sing of.

Despite its overshadowing presence and global prestige, San Francisco no longer serves as the population hub of the Bay Area. In terms of density, San Francisco is still second only to New York within the U.S. But in terms of overall population, San Jose, the city marking the southernmost limit of what is considered the Bay Area, actually surpasses San Francisco—a fact revealed for the first time by 1990 U.S. Census. The evolution of San Jose from an agricultural town to a bedroom community to the U.S.'s tenth-largest city reflects the tremendous growth of the Bay Area's technology industries, which since the 1960s have fueled economic development in the region. Many of the

world's preeminent high-tech engineering, manufacturing, computer, and internet companies are located in San Jose and the surrounding Peninsula-South Bay corridor, the area more commonly referred to as the "Silicon Valley." As a result of the Silicon Valley technology boom, today the Bay Area is one of the wealthiest regions in the entire U.S., with the highest per capita income of any metropolitan area in the nation.

No longer the economic hub it once was, the San Francisco financial district houses only one-third of the total white-collar jobs that sustain those high levels of affluence in the region (Garreau 1992:311). The rest are located in office parks scattered throughout the Silicon Valley and the East Bay—areas whose populations began to surge just at the moment San Francisco's began to dwindle in the 1970s (J. Rodriguez 1999:41). As far as major corporations go, San Francisco is home to only five Fortune 500 companies, including financial institutions Wells Fargo and Charles Schwab and clothing manufacturing juggernaut The Gap, Inc. (as well as the privately held Levi-Strauss & Co.). By contrast, a total of sixteen Fortune 500 companies headquarter in the South Bay-Silicon Valley region, including computer giants Apple Inc, Hewlett Packard, Cisco, Intel, Sun Microsystems, Google, eBay, and Yahoo!—a veritable laundry list of the most powerful global technology companies.[12] Not to be overlooked, the "edge cities" of the East Bay also provide significant private-sector employment, mostly through retail, food-manufacturing, and household-goods corporations such as Clorox, Chevron, Long's Drugs, Ross, Safeway, and Peet's Coffee & Tea, whose corporate headquarters are all located east of "the city."

[12] For an empirical study of the impacts of digital technology on social relations in the Silicon Valley area, see Michel S. Laguerre's *The Digital City: The American Metropolis and Information Technology* (2006).

The fanning out of white-collar industry, and the usurpation of San Jose over San Francisco in terms of population suggests a kind of postmodern decentering of the latter metropole. Whereas San Francisco once stood as a "headquarters city"—the term Manuel Castells used to describe the famed metropolis in his early 1980s writing on the Bay Area (1983:99)—today it simply stands as one node, albeit a culturally and economically important one, in the multinodal conurbation that is the Bay Area. On a daily basis, suburban commuters make their way into the city in cars, over bridges, and through public transit but, conversely, many of the upwardly-mobile high-tech professionals living in San Francisco's hippest residential enclaves venture out of the city to points south in the Silicon Valley to go to work; ironically, San Francisco increasingly serves as a bedroom community for the Silicon Valley.[13] Moreover, for a large proportion of the local labor force—both blue and white collar—daily commutes circumvent San Francisco entirely; office, tech, retail, and light-industry employment can be found outside the "headquarters city."

All of this points to the need for theorizing Bay Area urban spaces not in terms of the modernist metropole (re: the concentric circle model, with a central business hub and transportation routes expanding outward, like spokes on a wheel) but conjunctural, contiguous, contested sites—Foucault's "heterotopia." "Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites," Foucault states simply in "Of Other Spaces," the 1967 lecture in which he introduces the notion of heterotopia (1986). Edward Soja melds Foucault's concept of heterotopia with his own theorizations on the

[13] The need for adequate transportation from SF to the Silicon Valley is high enough that some major tech-industry employers, including Google, Yahoo!, Apple, and eBay, provide their own private commuter

relationship between space, urbanity, and power in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996:154-163). In his later book, *Postmetropolis*, Soja further develops those ideas, though this time he rarely refers to Foucault explicitly. Interestingly and apropos to this project, the author Soja cites most heavily in *Postmetropolis* is Iain Chambers, one of the most prominent thinkers in the British cultural-studies tradition, whose best-known works focus on youth and popular music (*Urban Rhythms* 1985) and urban popular culture (*Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience* 1986). Referring to Chambers as his "discursive tour guide," Soja opens up several passages in *Postmetropolis* by quoting Chambers extensively. One particular quote astutely captures the flexile, decentered, fractured sense of place in contemporary urban regions like the Bay Area:

> While the earlier city was a discrete geographical, economic, political and social unit, easily identified in its clearcut separation from rural space, the contemporary western metropolis tends toward drawing that "elsewhere" into its own symbolic zone. The countryside and suburbia, linked up via the telephone, the TV, the video, the computer terminal, and other branches of the mass media, are increasingly the dispersed loci of a commonly shared and shaped world. Towns and cities are themselves increasingly transformed into points of intersection, stations, junctions, in an intensive metropolitan network whose economic and cultural rhythms, together with their flexible sense of centre, are no longer even necessarily derived from Europe or North America (qtd. in Soja 2000:149).

Why is this important with regard to local hip-hop? Because one cannot talk about the local urban music scene without considering junctures, flows, intersections, "contact zones" (Pratt 1999), and "relations among sites." For rap artists and entrepreneurs, business does not start and end in 'hoods like Hunter's Point in San Francisco or the "Murder Dubs" in Oakland or whatever neighborhood they happen to be reppin'.

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shuttles (Lloyd 2008).

Conscious rappers may live in Oakland, where rent is cheaper and black entrepreneurship and activism remain vital, but they come over to San Francisco for gigs, performing to earnest white college kids with disposable and discretionary income. Some of the Bay's hardest-hitting "hyphy" rappers hail from the working-class suburbs of Vallejo and Fairfield, but they come to Oakland to "slang" (i.e. "sling" or sell) CDs and build inner-city credibility. And since the majority of concert promoters and club owners refuse to book "hardcore" rap in the big cities of Oakland and San Francisco for fear of violence, mayhem, and youth attendees "wildin' out," MCs and their fans trek up north to performance venues in the "hella country" cow towns of Petaluma and Santa Rosa.

Again, the local identifier that can best serve as a kind of master symbol of the Bay Area's circulatory, intersectional, and polycentric sense of place is the trans-bay bridge. To extend the metaphor further: nothing flows smoothly, or freely, on those bridges. You have to pay a toll just to access them. Once you are on, traffic is stop and go. Sometimes there are breakdowns that halt traffic altogether. When it moves, the direction of the flow tells you something about the labor and purchasing power of locals. On Friday and Saturday evenings, hordes of revelers funnel across San Francisco-bound bridges to take part in big-city nightlife, since few can actually afford to live in the city full time.[14] Nor can most people afford to live near the jobs they commute to during the week. The Bay Area's housing shortage and incredibly high cost of living means those struggling to sustain the middle-class dream must post their white picket fences in far-outlying suburbs like Hercules and Pittsburg (and, even more inconveniently, the

[14] As further evidence of the exclusivity of San Francisco, bridge tolls are always collected driving into the city on the Golden Gate or Bay bridges; leaving the city is always free.

Stockton and Sacramento areas, which are not even technically part of the Bay Area; they are also, perhaps unsurprisingly, the site of some of the highest home-foreclosure rates in the nation). Daily commutes into the city or the Silicon Valley routinely take over an hour each way.

In the Bay Area, the "relation among sites" is fundamentally one of stark contrasts, driven by the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. It is one of the wealthiest regions in the entire U.S., but it is also one of the nation's most expensive places to live. Only about twelve percent of Bay Area households can afford a median-priced home in the region. Lack of both affordable real estate and rentals has caused a housing-shortage crisis that shows no signs of abating, even after the nationwide real-estate bubble burst in 2007.[15] Yes, its assets are immense: the Bay Area has what many regard as some of the most beautiful natural scenery and best climates in the world; it boasts world-class cultural institutions and a vital idea- and information-driven economy. Nevertheless, not all denizens of the region benefit directly from such factors. The incredibly high cost of living pushes individuals who would qualify in other parts of the U.S. as "working class" into the category of "working poor." Dilapidated housing stock, low-performing schools, and high rates of joblessness, poverty, crime, and high-school dropout plague low-income neighborhoods and struggling blue-collar cities such as Oakland, Richmond, and East Palo Alto, where the majority of the region's manual-labor and service-sector employees reside. "Inner city" actually proves an inadequate descriptor for many such impoverished zones, since low-income "ghettos" are primarily

located in cheap suburbs and in the peripheries of the big cities (San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose), whose urban cores are prone to gentrification as they shift from financial-industrial hubs to high-end residential and retail spaces.

The relationship between San Francisco to Oakland, the region's two oldest and most cosmopolitan cities, serves as a telling example of the extreme economic disparities that characterize the Bay Area. Although both cities flourished during the WWII economic boom, serving as dual loci of the West Coast maritime and Pacific Rim shipping industries, only San Francisco managed to remain prosperous after the onslaught of deindustrialization that began in the 1960s. It did so by transforming its economy from a shipping and industrial base to a focus on the technology, finance, tourism, and service sectors. Oakland, on the other hand, still runs one of the U.S.'s most important international shipping terminals and one of the world's largest container ports, but never fully recovered from the massive loss of industry that for decades sustained middle- and working-class communities there. Although spillover from the tech- and knowledge-based industries has led to some economic development in downtown Oakland, overall the city still struggles with massive unemployment and an epidemic of street violence and crime. Oakland (as well as nearby Richmond) has the dubious distinction of being one of the most dangerous cities in the U.S (Bulwa 2006). Not coincidentally, Oakland is the city most closely associated with local rap. The unofficial regional capitol of hip-hop, Oakland has produced more MCs of note than any other Bay Area city—a testament to

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[15] Source: FOCUS, a joint-policy committee of the Assoc. of Bay Area Governments, Bay Area Air Quality Mgmt. District, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and Metropolitan Transportation Commission, www.bayareavision.org

the ongoing connection between hip-hop culture and urban strife, the condition from which the art form emerged in the 1970s Bronx.

Given the enormous gap between rich and poor in the Bay Area, it is no wonder that conscious MCs so often rap about the injustices of poverty while street rappers paint grim pictures of the dangerous, blight-ridden neighborhoods where they were raised. Regardless of which hip-hop "camp" (i.e. backpacker/conscious/political or street/hardcore/hyphy) those lyrics issue from, local rap offers a counternarrative to more dominant discourses about the Bay Area that portray the region in idealized, utopic terms. Common perceptions of the Bay Area revolve around its liberal political climate, its racial diversity, its "tolerance" of ethnic minorities and alternative lifestyles, its vanguardist cultural attitudes and avant-garde artistic enclaves, and its innovative entrepreneurial landscape. To a large extent these perceptions hold true, reflecting a set of historical and structural conditions without which Bay Area hip-hop in its present form could not exist. Like the region it is located in, Bay Area hip-hop is in itself highly diverse, unusually progressive, and undeniably innovative—in some sense a "product of its environment" in the best possible way. But Bay Area rappers offer their own twist on utopic regional narratives, often "flipping the script" in order to reveal more dystopic flipside realities. For example, for all the diversity in the area, there is also de facto segregation, with the majority of African Americans, Latinos, and recent Asian immigrants dwelling in marginalized, claustrophobic ghettos while primarily whites enjoy residential mobility and ownership of prime real estate tracts. For all the talk of tolerance, people from low-income urban areas—particularly poor communities of color—face constant threat of displacement as young professional elites move back into

cities (a reversal of their parent's earlier "white flight") seeking the excitement and authenticity of urban life, all the while homogenizing urban culture by gentrifying formerly ethnic enclaves and working-class neighborhoods. I refer to this process throughout my analysis as "reverse white flight," an especially pointed problem for San Francisco in the historically black neighborhood of the Fillmore-Western Addition and the historically Latino Mission District as well as, increasingly, pockets of central, North, and West Oakland.

The Bay Area is undeniably affluent, but that wealth does not translate into the region becoming a digital-age utopia of the kind touted by city boosters and business-oriented urban theorists such as Richard Florida, whose influential book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) places the San Francisco-Silicon Valley region at the top of the list of economically and culturally robust metropolitan areas in the U.S. In stark contrast to Florida's sanguine work, urban activist and cultural historian Rebecca Solnit poses Bay Area affluence as, fundamentally, a social problem. While obviously not a problem for the managerial elites who benefit directly from local economic development—particularly the technology and real estate booms of the past several decades—overall, Solnit argues, "[t]oo much affluence is not really good for urban culture: activism and the arts are dwindling, not multiplying, as affluence spreads here" (2000:121). Focusing primarily on San Francisco, Solnit emphasizes excessive wealth, not deindustrialization, as the driver inequality, the producer of homogeneity, and the displacer of vital communities of artists, activists, and ethnic minorities who she claims make urban spaces urbane. Posing prosperity as a "widespread urban problem" (154), Solnit points out how the poor and working-class can no longer afford to live in tech-economy boomtowns such

as San Francisco (as well as other tech centers such as Seattle, WA and Austin, TX, which also top Richard Florida's list) because of housing shortages and the high cost of living. Solnit's work offers an interesting contrast to the postindustrial dystopias described by neo-Marxist L.A. School theorists—those pessimistic portrayals of widespread urban decay proffered most famously by Mike Davis in *City of Quartz* (1990) and *Ecology of Fear* (1998). Whereas deindustrialization ravaged cities across America during a harsh period of economic restructuring that began in the late 1960s and continued well into the 1990s, Solnit describes San Francisco as "ravaged" by wealth today: "Thirty years ago we worried that cities were being abandoned to desperate poverty and decay…no one foresaw that cities could be abandoned to the ravages of wealth…Something utterly unpredictable has happened to cities: they have flourished, with a vengeance, but by ceasing to be cities in the deepest sense. [They are] becoming a city-shaped suburb for the affluent" (166).

Of course, stark inequality is no more new to the Bay Area than countercultural activity. Rather than frame local hip-hop as an historically isolated outcropping of the post-dotcom era, the following discussion situates the scene within a long, vital, tumultuous tradition of (sub)cultural innovation tempered always by social disparities—by the uneven distribution of economic resources among different artistic and ethnic communities. By no means a comprehensive cultural history, this selective overview of the Bay Area subcultural landscape from mid-century onward proceeds as a play of contrasts. From beat poets to backpacker rappers, Bay Area underground artists have long conferred cultural capital upon the region, contributing to the sense that it is a hip, vibrant, desirable place to visit and live in. However, in most mainstream histories of the

Bay Area from WWII onward, certain artistic communities receive greater attention than others. The 20th-century sub- and counter-cultural movements that tend to dominate the Bay Area post-war historic imaginary are the ones that reinforce the region's reputation as a socially "liberated" and "tolerant" area—Haight-Ashbury hippies being the prime example. Solnit convincingly argues these perceptions tie all the way back to the Gold Rush era, when "the absence of traditional social structures, the overwhelmingly young and male population, and wild fluctuations of wealth produced independent women, orgiastic behavior, epidemics of violence and an atmosphere of liberation" (2000:31). "For many decades afterwards," Solnit contends, "[the area] was celebrated as a cosmopolitan version of the Wild West town, with malleable social mores, eccentrics and adventurers a big part of the social mix" (31).

The embrace of difference and the cultivation of radicalism are characteristics typically touted by contemporary historians, especially New Left writers who have enshrined the countercultural figures of the beatnik, the flower child, the psychedelic rocker, and the New Left rebel as key representatives of a progressive era in a liberated area (Anderson 1996; Cohen & Zelnik 2002; Farber 1994; Gitlin 1987; Matusow 1984; Miller 1987; Rorabaugh 1989). These figures become quasi-mythical characters in most mainstream retellings of the 1960s story, from the touted documentary *Berkeley in the Sixties* (Kitchell 1990) to the numerous VH1 cable-television specials aimed at babyboomers, such as their *The Drug Years* (Perry & Perry 2006) and *Sex: The Revolution* (Perry & Perry 2008) documentary miniseries. But there is an underside to this dominant imaginary—a historical flipside that Bay Area hip-hop is as much if not more a product of. What gets swept under the shag rug of 1960s populist history are the

stories of embattled artistic communities of color located in the region's geographic and social margins—in some cases the fringes of an already "fringe" counterculture. Overshadowed by stories of the Summer of Love are the African-American and Latino blues, jazz, funk, and rock players who created distinctive music scenes of their own during and after WWII. These scenes receive much less attention than the countercultural activities of middle-class young whites, who are primarily given credit for reinvigorating the Bay Area's "liberated" social atmosphere a century after the Gold Rush. The history of Fillmore District jazz, West Oakland blues, East Bay funk, and Mission District Latin rock challenges characterizations of the Bay Area as exceptionally "tolerant" because, in the case of the two former scenes, those musical communities experienced marginalization and outright dissolution at the hand of the structural forces of gentrification, displacement, and "urban renewal"; in the case of the latter two scenes, their multiracial makeup and foreign-sounding musical influences jibed uneasily within underground psychedelic-rock circles. And so, while contemporary Bay Area hip-hop belongs to a community much wider than one neighborhood or even one city, its practitioners are the inheritors of a legacy of local musical production within a creative but far-from-utopic regional climate—a climate that remains tempestuous into the present day.

Uncovering the Counterculture

The debut of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" in San Francisco. The Summer of Love in the Haight-Ashbury. Psychedelic rock concerts at the Fillmore West. The Hell's Angels debacle at Altamont. The Free Speech Movement at U.C. Berkeley. The Black Panther

takeover of the State Legislature. The American Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island. Some of the most iconic moments of the so-called countercultural "revolution" in the post-war years occurred in the Bay Area. With its reputation for being "a sanctuary for the queer, the eccentric, the creative, the radical, the political and economic refugees" (Solnit 2000:31), the region tends to produce cultural moments and movements a bit to the left of the U.S. center. Bay Area hip-hop rightfully belongs within that tradition, but with a twist. When local hip-hop heads are asked whether they view their scene as indebted or in any way connected to the countercultural legacy of the 1960s, for the most part the only explicit link they make is with the Black Panthers. Ise Lyfe, an African-American conscious rapper from Oakland, attributes a pervasive sense of radicalism, felt everywhere from the 'hoods to the college campuses, directly to the presence of the Panthers: "In the Bay, I think the political consciousness comes from the history that's here. It doesn't matter how much crack you sell, if you're family's been in Oakland for 50 years, somebody was a Panther. Somebody knew Huey. Somebody saw that emerging, you know what I'm saying?" (personal communication).

Local hip-hop's link to postwar counterculture is there, at times overtly acknowledged, at others implicitly felt. I would argue that every time a radical rap act spits revolutionary lyrics, or a street MC launches into a weed- or ecstasy-induced psychedelic rant, or a hyphy "turf" dancer makes a flamboyant, gender-bending gesture, there exists at least an unconscious connection to a region that has long encouraged eccentricity. In the context of mainstream hip-hop, being politically radical, psychedelically addled, or flamboyantly expressive are daring cultural moves given the overwhelming emphasis within commercial rap on rigidly masculine codes of self-

mastery and control. Yet most local "heads" have difficulty seeing the connection (beyond the Panthers) to a broader countercultural legacy because that legacy has historically been painted white. When one imagines a beat poet, a hippie, or a campus activist, typically the image that comes to mind is that of a young Caucasian. Although non-whites participated enormously in countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s their participation all too often gets overlooked and "whited out" of official histories, unless one is specifically talking about civil rights and Black Power protests. Few histories make more than passing reference to the historic significance of the Third World Liberation Front strike, organized by a multiracial coalition of African-American, Mexican-American, Asian-American, Filipino, and Native American student groups at San Francisco State University, who demanded greater diversity within campus curriculum and admissions. The longest strike in U.S. history, these efforts led to the formation of the nation's first Ethnic Studies departments at S.F. State and U.C. Berkeley in 1969.[16]

I argue that this broader regional history of postwar cultural rebellion and multiracial vanguardism sets the stage for a highly eclectic and eccentric Bay Area hip-hop scene. The following chapters spell out the multiple ways in which Bay Area hip-hop reflects and reinforces a sense of place historically indebted to the postwar urban-cultural explosion that began in the 1940s and extended all the way into the 1970s, the heyday of the Black Power Movement. But before proceeding to make those connections between present-day hip-hop and previous generations of artists and activists, it is necessary to fill

[16] As a telling testament to this historical oversight, no comprehensive history of the Third World Liberation Front has been published to date.

in a few historical gaps in the dominant Bay Area cultural imaginary. I do this by invoking a number of musical predecessors whose work is insufficiently incorporated into most mainstream accounts of mid-century regional cultural history. I begin by looking at two predominately African-American neighborhood-based music scenes that flourished during the 1940s and 1950s: the Fillmore District jazz in San Francisco, an area once referred to as the "Harlem of the West," and the rhythm and blues scene in West Oakland, both of which were virtually eviscerated at the hands of "urban renewal." I conclude with a brief discussion of dizzyingly eclectic, multi-ethnic, and multiracial funk and Latin rock traditions of the 1960s and 1970s, whose streetwise proletarian performers mixed uneasily among the sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie who dominated New Left and hippie underground circles. Including these musicians into Bay Area cultural history's cast-of-characters gives a better idea of where local hip-hoppers are coming from and the ongoing exclusions they are up against.

Bohemian Blackouts

Certain Bay Area place-names show up in rap songs more than others, particularly in the more 'hood- and turf-conscious street rap of the hyphy movement and its "mobb music" predecessors. When name-checking specific places, local MCs most commonly cite the cities of Oakland, Richmond, Vallejo, as well as the Fillmore and Bayview-Hunter's Point districts of San Francisco. The reason for this stems back to the mid-20th-century. All are primary areas of African-American settlement during World War II, when massive numbers of Southern blacks migrated to the Bay Area to find work in the booming defense and maritime industries. During the war, the region became the

world's largest shipbuilding center, as both the U.S. military and the private sector expanded production to meet wartime demands (Johnson 1993). The military based their operations in Naval shipyards, Army bases, and air stations in Oakland, Vallejo, Alameda (a small island flanking East Oakland), and Hunter's Point in San Francisco, while the Kaiser and Bechtel corporations built large ship-manufacturing centers in Richmond and Marin City[17]. Overall, the Bay Area black population tripled during war; in Richmond, Vallejo, and the San Francisco Fillmore District, the black population actually increased tenfold (Wollenberg:248).

The city of Oakland also experienced an enormous expansion of what was already a sizeable African-American population. As far back as the late 19th century, African Americans had established a major presence in the city, working primarily as Pullman porters after Southern Pacific completed construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, for which West Oakland was the terminus. In the early decades of the 20th century, more African Americans arrived seeking work in the booming cannery and shipping industries; many were refugees from San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake virtually demolished the city (J. Rodriguez 1999:54). They settled primarily in West Oakland, adding to a racially diverse mix that also included European Americans (especially of Irish and Mediterranean descent) and Mexican, Japanese, and Chinese immigrants. During World War II, West Oakland's African-American population grew even more, as rural blacks from the South—primarily from poor areas of Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and

[17] Located just north of San Francisco, within the famously elite confines of Marin County, Marin City is basically a public-housing project-turned city. Originally built to house shipyard workers, today the tiny city is the only area within the entire county with a significant African-American population. In the hip-hop community, people know it as one of several places where Tupac Shakur lived during his time in the Bay.

Arkansas—arrived to take part in the massive shipbuilding industries. (Still the neighborhood remained mixed until the "white flight" phenomenon of the 1950s.)

By and large, most neighborhoods and towns in the Bay Area with large African-American populations can "trace their origins to the war years" (Wollenberg:248). This also includes the Fillmore District of San Francisco. Its African-American population boomed when, during WWII, Southern black migrants moved into housing previously occupied by Japanese Americans, who were forcibly relocated to internment camps throughout California.[18] Maya Angelou recalls witnessing this tragedy-tinged racial and spatial transformation in her classic novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:

> In the early months of World War II, San Francisco's Fillmore district, or the Western Addition, experienced a visible revolution…The Yakamoto Sea Food Market quietly became Sammy's Shoe Shine Parlor and Smoke Shop. Yashigira's Hardware metamorphosed into La Salon de Beaute owned by Miss Clorinda Jackson. The Japanese shops which sold products to Nisei customers were taken over by enterprising Negro businessmen, and in less than a year became permanent homes away from home for the newly arrived Southern Blacks. Where the odor of tempura, raw fish and cha had dominated, the aroma of chitlings, greens and ham hocks now prevailed. The Asian population dwindled before my eyes…No member of my family and none of the family friends ever mentioned the absent Japanese. It was as if they had never owned or lived in the houses we inhabited." (qtd. in Solnit 2000:44)

In the place where one minority enclave disappeared, another one flourished—culturally, if not economically.[19] From the mid-1940s through the 1950s, the Fillmore District blossomed as a world center of jazz music. Known at the time as the "Harlem of

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[18] In *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in American Society* (2000), Michel S. Laguerre provides a historical overview of the forced removal of Japanese Americans from the Western Addition in WWII, and the subsequent redevelopment of a six square-block portion of that neighborhood in the late 1960s. Today, "Japantown" offers a mall-like simulacrum of the former ethnic enclave.

[19] In *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*, historian Albert S. Broussard stresses that the concentration of blacks in the Fillmore District was largely a result of segregationist housing policies and attitudes in SF—a backlash impulse against the huge wartime migration

the West," the neighborhood featured numerous jazz clubs and dives where on any given night local legends John Handy and Eddie Duran could be seen mingling and jamming alongside national giants such as Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Dexter Gordon, and Billy Holiday. Veteran trumpeter Allen Smith recalls, "You could hit two or three clubs in one block, each with a band. Racial prejudice was practically nonexistent. You gotta remember that blacks weren't even welcome on the east side of Van Ness Avenue—but all the races could mix in the Fillmore. You could be out all hours of the night, partying with whomever you cared to, and you didn't have to worry about anybody mugging you or bothering you. It was just very cool" (qtd. in Hildebrand 2007). As in West Oakland, African Americans were a dominant cultural presence in the neighborhood, but people of all races and ethnicities intermingled.

San Francisco city officials effectively muted most of that musical activity when they began implementing a massive redevelopment plan in the late 1950s. Stretching all the way into the 1970s, the Fillmore-Western Addition redevelopment project was one of the most ill-conceived "urban renewal" attempts in U.S. history, displacing approximately 4,000 African-American families in a process nicknamed by locals as "Negro Removal." The project involved razing many of the aging Victorian homes in which black families resided in order to erect modernist concrete apartments and nondescript shopping plazas that would supposedly revitalize the area. City officials justified the project by claiming the neighborhood teemed with dilapidated housing stock and lacked substantial commercial development, emphasizing blight over jazz-age bustle.

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of blacks, who were forced to occupy the most substandard, overcrowded, unsanitary housing stock in the Fillmore (1993:173).

Reports from the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency at the time make no mention of the music scene at all, as if it did not exist (Solnit 2000:46-7). To clear the area for redevelopment, the agency bought houses from beneath black owners, issuing certificates to residents that promised they would receive first pick of newly redeveloped dwellings. Unfortunately, by the time new housing was ready for occupancy—which, in the case of many apartments and condominiums, took decades—certificate holders had either died, settled elsewhere, been priced out of the neighborhood many times over, or the City had lost records of their existence (Wagner 1998:A). In the words of one local barber, interviewed for a 2001 PBS documentary about the neighborhood, "We used to call it the Fillmore. Then it became the 'No More'."[20]

Although significant numbers of African Americans still live in the Western Addition, the numbers are nowhere near those of the immediate post-war period. The harsh redevelopment policies of that era produced a lingering sense of San Francisco as a city hostile to African Americans—a sense only fortified by the city's soaring housing costs and dwindling African-American population. Today the rate of black out-migration in San Francisco is the highest in the nation (Fulbright 2008; Phelan 2008). In terms of hip-hop, this manifests in the gritty, me-against-the-world lyrics of Fillmore rappers Andre Nickatina, Rappin' 4-Tay, JT the Bigga Figga, San Quinn, and newcomers to the scene Big Rich and Messy Marv. Although the latter two artists emerged during the heyday of hyphy, and are often grouped into that movement, this new crop of San Francisco street rappers from the Fillmore (as well as Bayview-Hunter's Point, the only

[20] Directed by Rick Butler, "The Fillmore" originally aired on PBS on Jun. 11, 2001. This interview and more information about the documentary can be found at

other neighborhood in the city with significant black settlement) are actually considered by many to be too "street" to be hyphy. While hyphy—a movement that originated primarily in Oakland and Vallejo— favors playful insouciance and "freaky tales" of partying and misadventure, San Francisco rappers evince a more serious tone in their street-life chronicles, more closely resembling L.A. gangsta rap. And so, ironically, the Bay Area city that has most aggressively attempted to "sanitize" itself of what affluent residents consider undesirable urban elements (blight, crime, homeless people, and, it could be argued, low-income people of color) actually produces some of the most "hardcore," stridently street-oriented rappers in the region.

Like the Fillmore District, West Oakland is another neighborhood with a notable musical tradition that stands as an antecedent to present-day hip-hop. Concomitant with Fillmore jazz, West Oakland developed a rhythm and blues scene during the war, as Southern African-American migrants brought blues traditions with them from their homelands, mostly around the Gulf areas of Texas and Louisiana. Together with Los Angeles-based R&B musicians, Oakland blues artists helped create a distinctive West Coast sound that differed from the better-known Chicago blues, whose practitioners were steeped in the rural musical traditions of the Mississippi Delta. California blues, by contrast, rarely featured harmonicas or, according to San Francisco music journalist Lee Hildebrand, "that crying Mississippi guitar sound," (qtd. in Collins 1998:214) but instead intoned more urbane jazz-inflections—a true musical hybrid that blended everything from jump blues to bebop to boogie woogie to gospel.

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http://www.pbs.org/kqed/fillmore/learning/story.html.

It should be noted, however, that the Oakland sound diverged somewhat from the smooth, sophisticated, piano-based "cocktail blues" of Los Angeles. Because L.A. had emerged by the 1940s as the West Coast hub of the "race records" industry, its music scene tended to overshadow Oakland's importance on the black musical landscape. Oakland rhythm and blues had a reputation for being grittier and less polished than black music in L.A., qualities apparent in the technically rough recordings by West Oakland music impresario Bob Geddins (who wrote and produced the majority of local blues hits performed by such notables as Jimmy McCracklin, Lowell Fulson, and Sugar Pie DeSanto) and bawdy live performances. Blues legend Johnny Otis, who started his career in West Oakland, describes the ruggedness of neighborhood nightlife in his memoir *Upside Your Head!* (1993). Of the gritty juke joints lining the neighborhood's main artery of Seventh Street and nearby environs, Otis recalls "These places were referred to as Buckets-of-Blood and had a reputation for fights" (51).

This marginal position in relation to L.A., this tendency to characterize Oakland urban music as "rawer" and less refined than that of L.A. (where musicians have the advantage of close proximity to the music industry, accessing its technical and economic resources with greater ease) carries over into the hip-hop era. Bay Area rap artists often invoke their location at some remove from L.A. as well as New York—the two primary bases of the mainstream rap and the U.S. music industry as a whole—as an explanation for their scene's down-home distinctiveness and its underdog status. The West Oakland blues scene foreshadows Bay Area hip-hop in another key way: it was multiracial and diverse. While the majority of musical legends who came out of the era were African American, there were numerous notable exceptions. Vallejo-born Johnny Otis, the most

famous non-black entertainer of the Oakland blues era, was of Greek heritage. Performing in black-music ensembles throughout his entire life, Otis also served for decades as an influential radio DJ and record producer, working with everyone from Etta James to Jackie Wilson to Gladys Knight. His musical legacy extends well into the funk and even hip-hop eras: his son, the enigmatic mixed-race performer Shuggie Otis, penned the Johnson Brothers hit "Strawberry Letter 23," a slinky synth-funk precursor to the West Coast hip-hop sound, sampled by everyone from Dr. Dre to OutKast. The elder Otis is also credited with "discovering" Sugar Pie DeSanto, an unsung heroine of both the Fillmore jazz and Oakland blues scenes who later became a vocalist for James Brown, and whose black-Filipino mixed heritage reinforces the Bay Area's reputation as racially kaleidoscopic region. Otis even suggests West Oakland blues dives were a sanctuary for diverse sexual identities. Offering up a humorous anecdote about two "obviously gay" black women patronizing an Oakland juke joint in the 1940s, Otis recalls "they sat in a booth, sipping their drinks and hugging and kissing," until a male patron tried to force one of them to dance with him. "The lesbian lady grabbed him by the nuts, walked him out the door, and decked him with a right cross" (1993:51).

The diverse cultural fusions and ruggedly urban sensibilities of West Oakland blues foretell the ways in which local rap artists, particularly those from Oakland, continue to fashion their musical identities in contrapuntal relation to a broader musical mainstream. But the demise of the West Oakland blues scene, like the fracturing of Fillmore jazz, also reveals something about where Oakland rappers are coming from. As in the Fillmore, West Oakland became a "'hood," a "ghetto"—the kind of low-income, high-crime area emphasized in rap music—as a result of a series of "urban renewal"

projects that, in the two decades following the war, combined to obliterate a once-thriving nightlife scene. In the 1950s, the federal government built the Cypress Freeway, a stretch of Interstate 880 that cut directly through West Oakland's main artery of Seventh Street and isolated the neighborhood from the city's downtown urban core, paving the way for ghettoization. The 1960s saw the construction of a massive twelve-square-block U.S. Postal Service distribution facility along Seventh Street that further devitalized the formerly commercial corridor that in the 1940s and 1950s was alive with small businesses: soul food restaurants, nightclubs, barbershops, and boutiques.[21] Additional blocks of West Oakland were razed in the 1960s to build the Acorn Plaza, a massive public-housing development intended to accommodate growing numbers of impoverished Oakland residents who had never recovered financially from the loss of wartime-era jobs. Rather than help the situation, the Acorn "redevelopment" project had the effect of displacing many low-income Oakland homeowners who purchased property during the shipbuilding heyday. Instead, Acorn offers (then and now) mostly sub-par subsidized rentals in oppressive, monolithic modernist structures. The complex is notorious as a hotbed of the black-market drug trade; it is, in fact, the site where Black Panther founder Huey P. Newton was murdered, allegedly over a botched drug deal, in 1989. Residence in the "Acorn towers" is so dangerous that local rappers and hustlers who grew up there assert this fact like a badge of honor—and endurance.

The final structural blow to West Oakland also occurred in the 1960s with the opening of BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit), a mass-transit rail and subway system that

[21] For a useful, condensed history of post-war West Oakland, see "Remembering 7th Street: Virtual Oakland Blues and Jazz," a web-based history project undertaken by the U.C. Berkeley Journalism School

made public-transportation commutes possible between San Francisco, the East Bay, and the Peninsula. Unlike the underground transit stops in downtown Oakland, the massive West Oakland BART station is an elevated structure flanking Seventh Street, bringing immense disruption to the neighborhood in terms of noise, footpath obstruction, and visual blight. For West Oakland residents in the 1960s, BART was the last straw. Local African Americans organized to contest the project, calling for at the very least "affirmative action" by BART in return for the disruption the transit station would cause: they demanded BART hire Oakland minorities in large numbers to build and operate the system, thus bringing much-needed jobs back into the community and the city (J. Rodriguez 1999:48). BART officials balked at these requests, viewing the public transit system as boon to poor locals, providing them with more mobility and access to jobs, many of which were in outside suburbs (J. Rodriguez 1999:49). They could not see West Oakland as anything more than "simply a 'ghetto'" for which access outward would be an improvement, and construction moved forward (J. Rodriguez 1999:57).

Despite the devastatingly negative impacts of urban redevelopment projects in West Oakland, resistance to them inspired a wave of community activism that facilitated the rise of the Black Panthers, who were involved directly in the BART fight (J. Rodriguez 1999:56; Rhomberg 2004:148). Black Panther Party founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale both grew up in West Oakland, and based the group's operations in the neighborhood, where they famously distributed free breakfasts to local children and held numerous protests and organizing meetings. As stated previously, the influence of the Black Panthers is still a palpable presence in the lives of Bay Area hip-hoppers,

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and Architecture Dept., http://7thstreet.org.

particularly for those who hail from Oakland. Even those who are not overtly political view the Panthers' legacy of community organizing and radical activism as ennobling—a proud tradition that, for many, they are the descendents from. One young rapper from the Acorn Projects, B-Janky from the hyphy rap group the Trunk Boiz, proudly asserted to me that "we got Black Panther in our blood. [Our manager] Andre's mom is an active Panther now. She be droppin' game on us, you feel me? She still gets around, she's still staying out here. She's been telling us to get involved with it, but we get sidetracked doing things. But eventually we're gonna be going to the meetings again."

Whether or not local hip-hoppers know the cultural history of their parents' and grandparents' generations, they labor under many of the same conditions—urban decay, revitalization attempts, neighborhood displacement, wage gaps, job flight—that crystallized at mid-century. The annihilation of Fillmore jazz and West Oakland blues reveals how tenuous local cultural production can be when undertaken by a community of producers who live on the social margins. In this sense, the Bay Area can be construed as anything but a freewheeling cultural haven, a land of unrestrained artistic expression and unfettered creative venturing. Such is the case only for the most privileged, who can afford the kinds of spaces—studios, workshops, lofts, etc.—necessary to create freely. Everyone else has to hustle and grind. Physical space (i.e. real estate, room to maneuver) runs at a premium in the Bay Area, costing more there than almost anywhere else on the planet. Those priced out of the private sphere are forced to take it public, to the streets,

the sidewalk, the parks—those cracked-concrete spaces[22] where hip-hop tends to take root.

Undoubtedly, the Bay Area offers fertile ground for cultural innovation, cultivated by the region's long history as an outpost for entrepreneurs and prospectors, seekers and experimenters, artists and opportunists. But those activities do not occur in a vacuum, in the idealized "smooth space" of migrants, nomads, unregulated flows, and "free action" that French poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari theorize in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Rather, it is a social realm more closely resembling Deleuze and Guattari's "striated space" of the grid, the labyrinth, the system, Soja's "fractal city," full of boundaries and closed access points. Restrictive forces such as deindustrialization and uneven economic development color the way creative impulses get expressed, depending upon where one is located within the frayed, stretched-thin social fabric. When local hip-hop hustlers advise each other to "do it moving"—a common refrain in the hip-hop community—what they mean is jump, duck, sidestep, wiggle, and crawl if you have to, because the "rhizomatic" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) path to make it in this world isn't going to be smooth or easy. B-Janky, the self-professed "Wiggler King," describes the strategy thusly: "If I can't get through the front door, I'll go through the back. If someone says I can't do something, I'll find a way to do it."

For local hip-hoppers and their blues and jazz predecessors, the Bay Area sustains anything but the "anything goes" atmosphere depicted in local lore on everything from the 1849 Gold Rush to the 1967 Summer of Love. The suppression of Fillmore jazz and

[22] The metaphor of the "rose that grew from concrete" is a much-used descriptor for hip-hop and the resiliency of culture in the face of marginalization. It references the poem "The Rose That Grew from

West Oakland blues provides a telling counterpoint to dominant regional myths about cultural freedom, encapsulated in much better-known tales about beatniks and hippies, who represent avant-garde cultural movements that benefited directly from post-war affluence and white privilege. Rebecca Solnit, who has written extensively on San Francisco visual artists of the beat era, argues that one of the main reasons both "bohemias" flourished was because the artists and eccentrics associated with them were able to take advantage of the city's "copious supply of cheap housing [which] contributed to the era's sense of freedom" (2000:91). This was the postwar period of "white flight," as affluent, upwardly-mobile Anglo professionals moved out of cities and into the rapidly expanding suburbs. The out-migration of the upwardly mobile from cities led to a depreciating of urban housing costs in the 1950s and 1960s. In San Francisco, the cheapest rents could be found in the city's immigrant and African-American enclaves, including the Fillmore District. As those communities sank deeper into poverty as a result of the loss of blue-collar wartime jobs, young white bohemians from middle-class backgrounds were able to move in and live on the cheap, in many cases taking over rentals from dislocated families of color. In fact, it was primarily the Fillmore District where beat artists such as painter Jay DeFeo, filmmaker Bruce Connor, and poet Michael McClure established residency, studios, and exhibition spaces. Allen Ginsburg first read his watershed poem "Howl" at the Six Gallery in the upper Fillmore area, not the beatnik bohemia of North Beach. "'We were enjoying the Black Stores, the Black ambience, the Black music,' recalls McClure. 'We had our faces towards them but our butts towards Pacific Heights [the most luxurious old-money neighborhood of San Francisco]'" (qtd. in

Concrete" by Tupac Shakur (1999).

Solnit 2000:95). One wonders whether, looking down the slope of upper Fillmore Street toward the lower Fillmore jazz district, those artists could see African Americans packing up saxophones and drum kits into moving trucks.

A similar dynamic took hold in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood during the late 1960s. According to historian Joseph A. Rodriguez, "the Haight," as it is locally known, became associated with "nonconformists" decades before the hippies. In the 1940s it was home to labor union organizers, college students, and working-class political progressives. Racially diverse, the neighborhood had a sizeable Asian and African-American population; the latter demographic in fact exploded from 2 to 17 percent between 1950 and 1960, as blacks who had been displaced by redevelopment in the Fillmore-Western Addition moved in to take advantage of low rents (J. Rodriguez 1999:39). As the 1960s progressed, increasing numbers of young people from white middle-class suburban backgrounds settled there, also seeking inexpensive housing: not only college students but also the so-called "flower children" of the era—tune-in, turn-on dropouts who eschewed regular jobs and opted instead for cheap communal living (sometimes forty to a house). In an interview with Solnit, longtime resident and affordable-housing activist Calvin Welch claims the overwhelming majority of hippies drew from their parents' wealth to order to support their unconventional, anti-establishment lifestyles, leading the author to conclude "…the widespread revolutionary spirit of the sixties was made possible by an economy so expansive that its bounty spilled over onto the middle-class kids who didn't participate in it" (98). But that "spillover" did not reach most the Haight's non-white residents, who once again became vulnerable to displacement. According to Welch, hippies "depressed housing prices when they arrived,

and they chased out the African Americans who had relocated to the Haight from the adjoining Western Addition" (97).

All this seems to paint a grim picture of the potential for interracial and mixed-ethnic cultural collaboration—the very quality I am claiming is common in local hip-hop, and is in fact one of its most distinctive features. I point out these structural, racially tinged antagonisms under-girding the world of the Bay Area beatnik, hippie, jazz cat, and blues belter not to suggest the impossibility of multiracial and cross-class coalition but to emphasize how fraught and tenuous those collaborations are when they occur. They do however occur, and with unusual frequency in the Bay Area. They occur every time Afro-Caribbean spoken-word artist Azeem takes the stage with tour partner DJ Zeph, a white guy from Santa Cruz, or when Mission District rapper Jimmy Roses, who is Chicano, opens shows for Oakland label-mates Mistah FAB or Keak Da Sneak, who are African American. Just like they occurred when Johnny Otis played drums for the West Oakland Houserockers during World War II, or when white beat poets like Michael McClure frequented the desegregated spaces of Fillmore jazz clubs in the 1950s, or when black, Chicano, Filipino, American Indian, and Asian-American students jointly occupied the San Francisco State administration building during the 1968 Third World Liberation strike.

Multiracial "Mackedelia"

For all the racial antagonisms of the 1960s and 1970s, the period also fostered remarkable cross-ethnic and cross-cultural musical partnerships, particularly in the Bay Area. While acid-rock heroes such as Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead typically

receive more recognition as authors the psychedelic "San Francisco sound" (along with the white blues rockers of Big Brother & the Holding Company and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band), two equally influential bands embody the eclectic diversity that remains a fundamental element in Bay Area "musicking" (Smalls 1998) to this day: Sly & the Family Stone and Santana. Glance at any late 1960s photo of either band—or, for that matter, a photo of Tower of Power or Malo, the Family Stone's and Santana's counterparts in the East Bay funk and Mission District Latin music communities, respectively: the groups resemble multilateral U.N. delegations, only with much longer hair. They *were* ambassadors of a sort, bringing soul music and Latin rhythms to the acid rock scene. Comprised of a panoply of African-American, white, and, in the case of Santana and Malo, Latino musicians,[23] the four bands performed regularly at famed psychedelic rock venues the Fillmore West, Avalon Ballroom, and Winterland. Santana and the Family Stone were two of the most successful "crossover" groups of the late 1960s, blowing audiences away with historic performances at Woodstock. Likewise, the slightly lesser-known Malo and Tower of Power also appealed to white countercultural and college-going audiences but never lost their connection with the working-class communities of color from which they emerged. Both band's biggest hits, Malo's "Suavecito" and Tower of Power's "You're Still a Young Man," exist as classics in the "oldies" canon of inner-city car-cruising and lowrider culture.

Each band's genealogy reveals an astounding level of interracial and intra-regional collaboration that I argue sets an important precedent in Bay Area musicking,

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[23] Over the years, the revolving roster of Tower of Power has also included some Latinos, including founding members Emilio Castillo and Adolfo Acosta.

and lends credence to the commonly voiced claim that the region is unusually "diverse." The Family Stone included Sly (nee Sylvester Stewart) and siblings Rose and Freddie, who grew up steeped in the gospel traditions of the American South. Following a common migratory path, the Stewart family moved from Beaumont, Texas to Vallejo, California when Sly was nine years old. So too did Larry Graham, the Family Stone's Texas-born, Oakland-bred bassist, who is credited with inventing of the "slap bass" sound fundamental to funk music during his tenure with the band—lending credence to the claim that Oakland is in fact the birthplace of funk (Vincent 1996:95). With the addition of a horn section comprised of African-American trumpeter Cynthia Robinson and Italian-American saxophonist Jerry Martini, as well drummer Greg Errico, a white San Francisco native, the band became the first interracial, mixed-gender group in the history of American popular music. Funk historian Rickey Vincent explains how having an integrated band, even in the late 1960s, was virtually unheard of before the Family Stone. Of the band's horn section, he opines "[It was] an outrageous sight for a white guy and a black woman to be onstage playing instruments together" (1996:91), and concludes "Sly's band didn't just cross racial boundaries, they *obliterated* them" (92, emphasis in original).

Although absent women, Santana and Malo—the two bands headed by Chicano brothers Carlos and Jorge Santana, respectively—featured musicians from across the racial and ethnic spectrum, due in large part to the pan-Latin demographics of the San Francisco Mission neighborhood where they grew up and the multiracial student body of Mission High School, where the bands' founding members came together. "I would say Mission [High] was forty percent blacks and about twenty percent white," Carlos Santana

recalls. “The [rest were] Latin: Nicaraguan, Salvadorean, Costa Rican, Mexican. The majority of blacks came from Fillmore or Hunter’s Point” (qtd. in McCarthy 2004:69). In fact, Santana’s bassist David Brown (an African American) and *conguero* Michael Carabello (of Puerto-Rican descent) hailed from Bayview-Hunter’s Point. From the other side of the tracks, Santana’s drummer Michael Shrieve, organist Gregg Rolie, and guitarist Neal Schon were all white and hailed from the middle-class suburbs of the South Bay. Nicaraguan timbalist Chepito Areas joined the band as a recent immigrant, described by Santana road manager Herbie Herbert as “fresh off the fuckin’ boat, acne, short, slicked-back pachuco-style hair, couldn’t hardly speak a word of English” (McCarthy 2004:34). Shrieve recalls “Me and Gregg [Rolie] were curious objects to Carabello and Chepito when we first arrived in the Mission” (35), adding a telling tour anecdote: “I can remember this little white boy form the suburbs, sometimes thinking ‘this ain’t Kansas no more,’ [watching a] knife fight being stopped by Sly [Stone] in the hotel” (98). Rolie concurs: “It was an interesting culture clash joining Santana, meeting the guys in the band; we came from such different backgrounds, nobody understood anybody. The guys in the Mission were more hardcore than I was used to. When I first showed up, they thought I was rich because I had a car. The music in the middle held it all together” (35).

Beyond merely holding one band together, these networks of unlikely artistic alliances held together a kaleidoscopically multiethnic music scene, comprised primarily of performers from the Mission District and Oakland—areas that have long been strongholds for working-class communities of color regardless of “revitalization” efforts and middle-class bohemian resettlement. The band Azteca stands as a further example:

Chicano brothers Coke and Pete Escovedo, who founded the group, grew up in West Oakland but lived in the Mission for most of their musical careers, often performing with colleagues Santana and Malo. After Sly & the Family Stone disbanded, Greg Errico and Larry Graham performed briefly with Azteca before breaking off to form the influential East Bay funk band Graham Central Station. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, these trans-bay alliances extended to legendary Oakland multiracial funk ensemble Tower of Power, who toured extensively with Malo and shared producers and managers with Santana, Oakland R&B group the Pointer Sisters, integrated East Bay funksters Cold Blood, and Mission District rock band Dakila, comprised almost entirely of Filipino Americans (McCarthy 2004:119). Along with blacks, whites, and Latinos, Asians held down important roles, particularly in Malo, which was managed by Asian-American Chris Wong and featured Filipino-American lead guitarist Abel Zarate (who also played with Mission Chicano rock band Sapo).

Multiracial mixing also manifested in the politics of these groups. While it may not be surprising that Sly Stone and African-American members of Tower of Power aligned themselves with the Black Panthers, so too did the brothers Santana. During the early 1970s, Santana and Malo played Black Panther benefits in Berkeley, and in 1974 Santana recorded the track "Free Angela," criticizing the political imprisonment of Black Panther activist Angela Davis. Bay Area radio DJ and Mission native Chuy Varela explains that, for local Chicano youths, such activities reflected a growing sense of solidarity and shared interests between the Black Power and Brown Pride movements: "Before Carlos and Malo, we were isolated into our own community…Malo did these benefits and we'd be there. We started to get enlightened. It was tribal…After awhile we

were hippie lowriders" (qtd. in McCarthy 2004:38). Emphasizing black-brown connections through Afro-Latin music, Varela continues "[an] awakening was happening with the Black Power movement allied to Africa, and one of the things that came from that was the *bata* drum. Those black cats were playing *bata* first" (38).

Historian Joseph A. Rodriguez asserts that the Black Panther Party was itself fairly open to multiracial coalition building, despite its reputation as a black-separatist group. He attributes this "openness to assistance from any progressive allies" to the Panthers' "strong identification with West Oakland, which was a diverse community" in the 1960s and 1970s, with significant Mexican, Asian, and European immigrant populations (1999:56). Rodriguez specifically draws a link between the Panthers and their white activist contemporaries, particularly New Left student organizers up at U.C. Berkeley, just north of Oakland: "Panthers worked with progressive whites, particularly communists, who appeared at rallies alongside Panther leaders. The history of white activism, including the Bay Area labor movement and the free speech and anti-war movements, contributed to a somewhat integrated Black Power movement in Oakland" (56).

African-American and Latino solidarity with whites always occurred on tenuous ground, as it does currently in the realm of hip-hop. Santana, Malo, Sly & the Family Stone, and Tower of Power all made inroads into the San Francisco acid-rock scene, but as outsiders on white-dominated terrain. Carlos Santana remembers a sense of exclusion early in his career: "[V]ery few people personally would let us in, just Mike Bloomfield [of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band], Jerry Garcia, or Bill Graham. The rest of the [San Francisco] groups were very snotty to us. Jefferson Airplane were very snotty to us; a lot

of people couldn't hide what they were feeling. I felt some disgust and disdain" (qtd. in McCarthy 2004:60). A year earlier, at Santana's 1968 Fillmore West premiere, one local music critic noted the difference between psych-rock opener It's A Beautiful Day, which "played, kinda ethereal stuff, and then these hard asses from the Mission came on'" (56).

Similarly, Sly Stone had to implore that Clive Davis, the high-powered CBS Records executive who oversaw marketing for the Family Stone as well as Santana, put aside his skepticism to give his band a shot. "Davis at first wasn't convinced that, in the age of Aquarius, Sly's glittery costumes could reach whites, which at the time was the only market that concerned CBS" (George 2004:110). Ultimately the band did "cross over," scoring numerous Top 10 hits and an induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993. Despite this acknowledgment, Ricky Vincent argues Sly Stone never received proper recognition within the annals of 1960s rock, where he should rightly be lionized alongside the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, and Jimi Hendrix (1996:90). Music historian Nelson George argues Hendrix better appealed to whites because he favored a virtuosic electric-guitar-based sound rooted in the Delta blues—a style beloved by hippies[24] but one which "[urban] blacks had already disposed of" (2004:109)—whereas Sly's more rhythmic and danceable funk clearly located him within the contemporary tradition of James Brown, Motown, and other popular soul artists of the time, as well as, I would argue, the urbane Oakland R&B tradition of the previous generation. In other words, Sly Stone was too black to turn a whiter shade of pale.

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[24] Although the blues formed a fundamental element of the "San Francisco sound," local artists largely overlooked the homegrown Oakland blues tradition in favor of the putatively more "folkloric" and "authentic" harmonica-laced, wailing-guitar sound of Chicago and Mississippi Delta (Hildebrand 1998:111).

Working at the crossroads of black power and flower power, Sly & the Family Stone produced a sound and image that confounded some members of the hippie counterculture but appealed broadly to black listeners, and continues to do so. To this day, the band's music ranks among the most heavily sampled in hip-hop; locally, everyone from E-40 to Digital Underground to DJ Shadow has referenced the Family Stone. With his shiny bellbottoms, giant Afro, and platform boots, Sly took on a persona that was one part hippie, one part pimp, and one part dandy—a melding of street savvy with flamboyant bohemianism that stylistically unified the East Bay funk and Mission Latin-rock scenes and informs the "mackedelic" swagger of Bay Area hip-hoppers, hyphy kids and backpackers alike. "Mackedelia" is a phrase I'll occasionally use as shorthand for the stylistic affects of Bay Area urban music, whose performers have historically overlaid the "hardcore" aesthetics of street culture—a realm populated by colorfully notorious hustler, "ghetto girl,"[25] and pimp or "mack" characters—with the bohemian countercultural domain of hippies, revolutionaries, and "freaky" free spirits. This has resulted in unique regional imaginaries that carry over into contemporary hip-hop in ways to be explored in the following chapters.[26]

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[25] Feminist scholar Gwendolyn Pough discusses in-depth the trope of the "ghetto girl" and its many derivatives—the "'round the way girl," "gangsta bitch," "hood rat," "shorty," "ride or die" woman, "hoochie mama," "baby mama," "gold digger," the "sistah/girlfriend"—all of which represent varying degrees of patriarchal oppression and "womanist" empowerment, in her book *Check It While I Wreck It* (2004).

[26] This is evident, notably, in the funk influences within the music of legendary Oakland hardcore rapper Too $hort, attributable in large part to the production style of frequent Too $hort collaborator Al Eaton, 1970s funk-band veteran. Early in his career, Too $hort also worked with East Bay funk pioneer Marvin Holmes in studio sessions (Davey D 1996). Holmes is one of a rarified group of obscure, rough-and-tumble Bay Area soul, rhythm and blues, and funk veterans whose limited-release small-imprint recordings from the 1960s and 1970s have become hot commodities among the "crate digger" or "vinyl archaeologist" record-collector subset of the backpacker hip-hop community. Some of these crate diggers have gone on to

Chapter Two

What the Streets Are Saying: Hardcore Realities and 'Hoodspace Imaginaries

The demarcation between two camps, "backpacker" and "hardcore" hip-hop, is not unique to the Bay Area. It is part of a broader discourse that runs throughout the entire borderless hip-hop nation. In this chapter, I parse the signifiers, narratives, atmospherics, and imagery employed by local hip-hoppers to represent the latter camp: the realm of the "hardcore." For clarity's sake, I use the term "hardcore" to designate a sphere alternately referred using the descriptors "thug," "street," "turf," or "gangster" rap. While each term carries subtle distinctions, all describe a realm of hip-hop with a locus of authenticity rooted in the low-income, high-crime spaces of so-called inner cities, ghettos, and/or 'hoods. In order to be "hardcore," one has to identify with, represent for, and be a representative of the 'hood.

A polysemic term, "hardcore" connotes overlapping meanings in hip-hop contexts: 1) the experience of hardship, harsh or "hard" realities, difficult life experiences, economic privations and obstacles; 2) being "hard" or "hardened" to those life circumstances; being a survivor who has acquired the necessary personal armor to withstand and even thrive in such conditions; and 3) being "hard" or virile, suggesting a

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found influential reissue-based record labels and become key music tastemakers among hip-hop hipsters worldwide. Prominent among these labels, San Francisco's Luv N' Haight/Ubiquity released its *Bay Area Funk* (2003; 2006) compilation series in the 2000s (Arnold 2006a), which have brought international attention to previously-forgotten local musicians such as Holmes (Arnold 2003), Eugene Blacknell (Reese 2007), Sugar Pie DeSanto, "Little Denise" Stevenson, Johnny Talbott (Arnold 2004), and Daron "Darondo" Pulliam (Hildebrand 2006).

rigid and phallocentric masculinity that dominates this realm, to the extent that all other gender and sexual identities are rendered highly marginal.

Another way to parse the hip-hop hardcore is to contrast it with its other: “backpacker” or “underground” hip-hop and “conscious” or “message” rap are adjectives employed, at times interchangeably, to characterize an alternative and less territorialized sphere of hip-hop culture defined largely in oppositional terms to hardcore rap: whereas hardcore rappers emphasize personal prowess and monetary gain through boastful rugged-individualist “come up” narratives, conscious MCs focus on community uplift and self-empowerment through the acquisition of knowledge and spiritual rather than material enrichment; whereas street rappers seek major-label success and court mass audiences, backpackers often take an anti-corporate stance and define “true” hip-hop in relation to the “old school” practices of MCing, scratch DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti art—the four foundational hip-hop “pillars” or “elements” developed during the pre-corporate 1970s era; whereas gangster rappers view the music industry as an arena of power to seek access to—a “game” one needs to play despite the odds being stacked against you—underground hip-hoppers view corporate music companies as inherently corrupting, culturally homogenizing forces and favor independent means of production, distribution, and performance among smaller, globally diffuse niche fanbases; whereas thug rappers articulate rebellion and resistance largely in individualized terms—within the “I got mine, you get yours,” “shoot first or get shot” mentality inherent to the “code of the streets”—message rappers encourage political movement building and system-wide critiques of power.

But these are just generalizations. As virtually any hip-hop head will tell you, the lines of demarcation between these two broadly defined camps are neither rigid nor fixed but, rather, fairly permeable. For example, some of hip-hop's most biting indictments of the U.S. government's systematic oppression of minorities issue from hardcore L.A. gangsta rappers Ice-T, N.W.A., and Ice Cube. And few of the most renown American "conscious rap" artists, including Philadelphia's the Roots, Chicago's Common, Brooklyn's Talib Kweli, and the Bay Area's the Coup, actually function independently from the corporate music industry; most are either signed to subsidiaries of major record labels or, at the very least, they contract with the distribution arms of those companies to help them circulate their music to as wide an audience as possible. Granted, these artists are unlikely to pontificate, as hardcore rappers do, on "getting paid" in their lyrics or "make it rain" in their music videos (i.e. throw cash-money at the camera lens, in an extravagant gesture of one's personal wealth and capitalist fixations), but they will be the first to tell you: everybody's gotta eat. Food-consumption and alimentary tropes such as "getting fed," being "hungry," and "eating" (e.g. "nobody's eatin'") appear about equally in the discourses of both conscious MCs and street rappers to signify access to material wealth or, more modestly, subsistence levels of capital. Contemporary critics often take rap music to task for being overly materialistic, but the focus on consumption, private property, and the acquisition of resources holds a particular charge for artists from communities where basic levels of sustenance are not guaranteed.

More so than conscious MCs, however, hardcore rappers espouse an unabashed entrepreneurial obsession with "gettin' paid," and getting paid well, preferably by becoming one's own boss. For those with means, ostentatious displays of wealth (in the

form of platinum and diamond jewelry, expensive cars, designer clothing, etc.) are *de rigueur*. Much like the forms of "conspicuous consumption" 19th-century sociologist Thorstein Veblen attributed to the Industrial-Era nouveau riche (2007), postindustrial hip-hop hustlers flout restrained "old money" codes of propriety. These rap *arrivistes* defy aristocratic decorum not out of cluelessness to the code but out of blatant disregard for the rules of a ruling class whose members generally care little about the travails of the 'hood. I suggest that hip-hop commodity fetishism can be read parodically, as kind of "wink." Whether it is a Geertzian knowing wink[27] or a postmodern ironic wink, either way it serves as a cipher, an alternative to an overtly defiant flip of the bird to the bourgeoisie, using carnivalesque excess to highlight the absurdity and "schizophrenia" of late-capitalist desire (Deleuze and Guattari 1983), which reduces all human agency to a drama of alienated labor, lack, and compensatory consumption. I argue that such meta-aware, hypercapitalist displays form a kind of "immanent critique" (Lipsitz 1994:25); they are intuitively Marxian assertions by hip-hop upstarts that they have surpassed their lumpenproletariat status within an ossified, exploitive set of social relations and, rather astonishingly, gained access to capital and the means of production.

Yet this materialist sensibility (and I use "materialist" here doubly, in terms of both Marxian "historical materialism" as well as the colloquial notion of excessive consumerism), paired with hardcore rap's own unique brand of rugged individualism, does not make for an easy sense of progressive politics. Then again, the putatively more

[27] Anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously emphasizes ability to differentiate between an "involuntary twitch" and a conspiratorial, mischievous, or satirical "wink" as an example of the difference between merely empirical scientific observation and the interpretive task of anthropologists, who must be able to discern meaning, but often subtly layered, cultural behaviors (1973:6).

"progressive" attitudes found in conscious hip-hop could hardly be said to transcend the social relations in which it is implicated, or the dominant culture against which it rebels. In his essay on conscious hip-hop (referred to alternately as "message rap," Ernest Allen, Jr. relates:

> Message rap tends to carry with it considerable antisocial baggage characteristic of, but hardly limited to, the rap phenomenon in general: misogyny, homophobia, vainglorious trippings, interethnic malevolence...Politically conscious or otherwise, at the core of this righteous rebellion of African American youth lies an obsessive, generational preoccupation with social acknowledgment and respect... (1996:160)

Although the lines dividing backpacker and hardcore-rap sensibilities are often blurry, they are fundamental to hip-hop discourse because they provide the basic categories—the Weberian "ideal types" (Gerth & Mills 1958:59)—around which participants frame debates and make value judgments. They orient various interlocutors within arguments about authenticity, meaning, and merit in hip-hop. For someone who identifies more closely with the backpacker hip-hop camp—whether as a fan or an performer—questions of value and respect typically settle upon the issue of originality and an artist's ability to defy market forces by producing non-formulaic cultural works that confound mainstream tastes; the ultimate "sell out" would be to subjugate one's artistic impulses to the demands of the mass market. For someone representing "the streets," these more modernist-formalist conceptions of originality also matter, but arguably less so than the vexing, hard-to-pin-down categories of realness, rawness, and 'hood authenticity. Far from rendering one suspect, moving mass units is the end goal for most hardcore rap artists, who find no shame in playing the late-capitalist game. The trick is to avoid getting played, to evade corporate exploitation i.e. the extraction of your raw

‘hood cultural materials in order to line the pockets of white-collar white boardroom players. The goal is to be a player yourself, to become a “boss,” all the while staying rooted in “the streets”—the simultaneously real and imagined realm of hustlers and ‘hood rats, high-rise projects and crack traps, hard-knock lives and come-up trajectories.

Earning respect in “the streets”—understood implicitly and emphatically as the circulatory paths running through low-income ghettoized urban neighborhoods or “‘hoods”—serves as a primary authenticating gesture for hardcore hip-hoppers, who could hardly said to be “real” without birthplaces and biographies linked to the ‘hood. Sustained identification with those originary spaces, continuing to “ride hard” for your people in the streets, remains a requisite for respect within the hardcore rap camp.

The kind of street credibility and urban savvy required for acceptance in the hardcore rap community—whether as an artist, an associate of some kind, or even a legitimate fan—can rarely be acquired. In the majority of cases, legitimacy comes to those who spent their youths surviving, striving, and sustaining respect in ‘hood homelands, with all the racial, class, and gender dynamics implied therein. Young African-American men from hardscrabble backgrounds fit most easily within this street-oriented identity configuration. Blackness generally exists as the “prestige” racial location within the hardcore-rap sphere, just as, according to sociolinguist H. Samy Alim, Black English is the “prestige dialect” in all of rap music (2006:102). Nonetheless throughout hip-hop’s history numerous members of other U.S. minority groups who grew up with shared ‘hood knowledges have maintained standing within the street rap realm: Puerto Ricans (Flores 1994; Flores 2000; Rivera 2003; Rivera et al. 2009), Chicanos (Delgado 1998; Kelly 1993; Pérez-Torres 2006; Rodriguez 2003), Filipinos (de Leon

2004), and Samoans (Henderson 2006) especially. More so than racial ascription or simply being black, familiarity the simultaneously real and mythologized spaces of the 'hood works as the ultimate arbiter of authenticity. This is particularly true in the ethnically and racially diverse Bay Area where, given its sizeable working-class Latino and Asian immigrant population, hardcore rap attracts significant followings among young adults of Mexican, Central American, Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Island heritage.

Throughout my field research, I heard the socio-spatial identification "I'm from the 'hood" repeated often, emphatically and proudly, by young hardcore hip-hop heads. At first glance, this ascription appeared to be a simple and overdetermined class-based authenticating gesture. But the phrase's continual repetition suggested there was more cultural work inherent to the utterance. It eventually became clear that identifying with and "representing" for/from the 'hood means much more than stating one has the correct zip code in a sufficiently low-income urban Census track. If that were the case, low-income city dwellers could simply declare themselves "poor" and that would suffice. No such declaration ever came from the lips of any consultant I spoke to; being poor hardly carries the grittily romantic connotations of being from the 'hood, and is not something people tend to brag about.

More than simply residing in low-income urban environments, being "from the 'hood" serves as an index for a whole set of realities and fantasies, mythologies and materialities, hard facts and urban legends that, in combination, capture what hip-hoppers mean when they invoke such distinctions. The 'hood is represented throughout the hip-hop formation using now universally recognizable keywords: gangster, thug, hustler,

pimp, ho, ‘hood rat, player, baller, mack, crackhead, crack house, the projects, the streets, the block, the corner, etc. (It exists as parallel universe to projections of the “ghetto” in the social-scientific imagination, represented by such catchphrases as deindustrialization, blight, underclass, concentrated poverty, deficiency, pathology, hypersegregation, culture of poverty, at-risk youth, etc.) In addition to these shared and widely circulating signifiers, Bay Area hip-hoppers cultivate their own unique regional panoply of folk figures and hardcore fabulations that animate local tellings of life in the ‘hood. I devote the remaining pages of this chapter to analyzing the ways Bay Area hardcore heads draw local and global hip-hop signifiers together to create a unique vision of American ‘hoodspace.

‘Hoodspace Logics

Central to this discussion is a conceptualization of the ‘hood as simultaneously real and imagined—a literal and figurative space wherein representations continually mediate lived realities and vice versa. As a model for this kind of ethnographic analysis, I draw from cultural anthropologist Kathleen Stewart’s work on cultural poetics within impoverished settings—in her case, in “the hard-core Appalachian coal-mining region of southwestern West Virginia.” Far from culturally depleted, Stewart reveals that, in these socially marginal, struggling communities, one finds a “proliferation of stories,” and in the “fecund indeterminacy of a narrativized life the world grows at once more tactile and more fabulous” (1996:38). By “fabulous” Stewart implies the creative process of fabulation whereby residents invent stories, fables, and fantasies to make meaning out of everyday life, and in doing so construct a lived cultural real.

Like the storytelling done by denizens of Appalachian "hollers" in Stewart's ethnography, hardcore hip-hoppers produce narratives that render the 'hood "ghettofabulous"; I will occasionally use this semantical flourish to highlight the fabulatory aspects of the 'hood, riffing off the slang usage of the term "ghettofabulous" to describe an aesthetically heightened, site-specific "marvelous real"[28] irreducible to inert sociological signifiers such as "underclass" and "blight." Urban anthropologist John L. Jackson invokes ghettofabulousness in his Harlem-based ethnographic work, defining the term as "the belief that one can use qualitative means [storytelling, personal style, etc.] to outstrip assumed quantitative boundaries of [impoverished] place and [marginal] social position" (2005:40). Additionally, I will frequently refer to the highly mediated, narrativized sense of place—a sense I argue is implicit every time local hardcore hip-hop heads invoke "the 'hood"—as "'hoodspace." Here I also draw from Jackson's use of the phrase "Harlemworld" in his previous book (2003) to encapsulate his own elusive object of study: not just Harlem the physical location but Harlemworld, the locus of profuse self-reflexive representations (in media, literature, music, everyday talk, official public discourse, etc.).[29] Like Harlemworld, 'hoodspace serves as shorthand for the dynamic processes through which hip-hoppers "imagine the physical location itself" (Jackson 2003:7), constructing "places where social, economic, political, and cognitive factors all

[28] "Marvelous real" is actually a more precise translation of the name for the Latin American literary genre, "*lo real maravilloso*," referred to more commonly in English as "magical realism." The "reality" depicted in much hardcore rap could productively be framed in terms of a heightened, phantasmagoric *lo real maravilloso*, rather than journalistic or social realism.
[29] John L. Jackson's himself cribs the term "Harlemworld" from the 1997 hip-hop recording *Harlem World*, the debut album by Mase, a rapper formerly on Sean "P. Diddy" Combs' Bad Boy Entertainment music label.

have a part to play in the construction of spatial identity, in the creation of socially meaningful cartographies" (9).

Jackson employs what is essentially a Lefebvrian conceptualization of space (Lefebvre 1991) as socially produced rather than physically self evident or, for that matter, economically determined—the implicit premise of more orthodox Marxian arguments that describe the urban built environment in oppressive Foucauldian terms. (Davis 1990; Davis 1998) Hip-hop scholar Murray Forman draws from Henri Lefebvre as well, premising his examination on the importance of place in hip-hop culture on the "active process of making spatial sites significant—or the active transformation of space into place—[which] involves the investment of subjective value and the attribution of meanings to components of the socially constructed environment" (2002:28). In Forman and Jackson's arguments as well as my own, this "spatial turn" opens up room for a richer cultural analysis. In the context of my discussion of hardcore hip-hop, it brings into focus the remarkable cultural generativity evident in the process by which low-income city residents co-create 'hoodspace alongside society's more enfranchised, economically empowered stakeholders: public officials, urban planners, real estate developers, business owners, and law enforcement, who make their mark on such spaces primarily through acts of abandonment, containment, and neglect.

Foregrounding the figurative and fantastical aspects of 'hoodspace shifts important energy away from a compulsive quest for "the real," for scientifically accurate, reified representations of "the ghetto" that standard field studies of urban poverty often become mired in. Such works, in their meticulous attempts at social-realist verisimilitude, typically reduce expressive cultural practices (e.g. music, dance, fashion, verbal arts) to

mere coping devices, or to incidental by-products of more important, hegemonically imposed "hard structures": neoliberalism, deindustrialization, class exploitation, the dismantling of the welfare state, militarized police apparatus, housing segregation, frayed kinship networks, etc.—if expressive culture even manages to register at all (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 1996; Ladner 1971; Lewis 1975; Massey and Denton 1993; Newman 2000; Stack 1974; Valentine 1978; Williams 1989; Wilson 1996).

Robin D.G. Kelley, another hip-hop scholar whose insights I draw heavily from here, argues that an inattention to cultural generativity within 'hoodspace —the creative acts he describes as instantiations of play, leisure, and pleasure seeking—is evident even in classic inner-city studies that focus on expressive practices (urban folklore; blues, soul, and rap music; street vernacular and verbal art) but ultimately posit them as nothing more than functionalist "responses to" or "reflections of" impoverished ghetto settings (1997:35). Kelley criticizes a large body of work, primarily by cultural sociologists, urban ethnographers, folklorists, linguistic anthropologists, sociolinguists, and a few historians (Abrahams 1970; Foster 1986; Hannerz 1969; Keil 1966; Kochman 1981; Labov 1972: Lane 1986; Liebow 1967; Majors & Mancini Bilson 1992; Nightingale 1993; Rainwater 1970; Schulz 1969) for producing what are themselves "impoverished" interpretations of inner-city urban culture.

The cornerstone of Kelley's critique concerns these scholars' limiting treatment of the black vernacular tradition known as "the dozens": "yo mama" jokes, "snaps," and other ludic speech-play acts involving one-upsmanship and profane punch lines (which

are, not coincidentally, widely regarded as important antecedents to hip-hop verbal art[30]). Kelley refutes explanations of such practices as aggressive forms "ritual insult" among urban black young men who, in order to cope with the emasculating pressures of poverty, employ the dozens "either another adaptive strategy or an example of social pathology" (1997:32). He responds with an alternative reading: "The goal of the dozens and related verbal games is deceptively simple: to get a laugh. The pleasure of the dozens is not the viciousness of the insult but the humor, the creative pun, the outrageous metaphor" (34). Kelley castigates such authors—nearly all of them white and privileged, conducting research as outsiders in low-income African-American communities—for overlooking the affective registers that make such practices meaningful and popular among interlocutors in the first place: "Without a concept of, or even an interest in, aesthetics, style, and the visceral pleasures of cultural forms, it should not be surprising that most social scientists explained black urban culture in terms of coping mechanisms, rituals, and oppositional responses to racism" (35). Kelley notes that, surprisingly, the growing canon of hip-hop studies has been only marginally "useful in terms of nudging contemporary poverty studies to pay attention to expressive cultures" (35). I would argue this results from a disciplinary chasm between the social sciences and the best of academic hip-hop studies (Rose 1994; Kelley 1996; Forman 2002; Ogbar 2009; Ross & Rose 1994; Perkins 1996; Mitchell 2001; Watkins 2005), which issue primarily from the fields of cultural studies, ethnic studies, American studies, history, and media

[30] See Abrahams 1964; Gates 1988; Folb 1980; Labov 1972; Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Morgan 2002; Smitherman 1986.

studies/communications, where ethnographic research is rare and readings tend to be done from afar, from the vantage of the armchair.[31]

Following Kelley's intervention, my aim is to attend to the important registers of aesthetics, style, and pleasure in hardcore hip-hop, highlighting the artful processes through which local heads generate and reproduce stylized tropes, myths, figures, imaginaries, and ideational codes that in large part define Bay Area 'hoodspace. The cultural generativity I observed while doing field research in East Oakland and other Bay Area 'hoods—a vibrancy of style and poetic creativity evident despite the undeniable duress poverty places on a community—contrasts sharply with dominant portrayals in much of the aforementioned social scientific literature on "inner cities," "ghettos," "slums," and "barrios" that frame those areas as, fundamentally, spaces of desolation. Beginning with classic works of the Chicago School (Park & Burgess 1925; Wirth 1928) through to the "culture of poverty" studies and policy papers of the 1960s (Lewis 1966; Lewis 1975; Moynihan 1965) and seminal sociological examinations of the so-called "underclass" in the 1980s and 1990s (Jencks & Peterson 1991; Wilson 1987), these orthodox works on intergenerational urban poverty conflate material scarcity with cultural deficiency, resulting in reductive characterizations of "ghettos" as chaotic places frayed by social disorganization and institutional breakdown. Within this framework,

[31] I should add, however, that a newer generation of hip-hop scholars is emerging from within social-science disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and ethnomusicology (Alim 2006; Dimitriadis 2001; Keyes 2004; Krims 2000; Schloss 2004: Schloss 2009)

researchers could scarcely see the sophisticated acts of poiesis occurring right under their noses.[32]

Contrary to the timeworn "social disintegration" thesis, 'hoodspace actually operates under an internally regulated system of behavioral rules, informal economies, and cultural orders without which hardcore rap would lose its meaning. Fundamental to this is a set of precepts known as the "code of the streets." Elijah Anderson examines this subject in his aptly titled ethnography, *The Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (1999), describing circumstances in Philadelphia but producing widely generalizeable findings applicable to Oakland, San Francisco, or any other U.S. city containing zones of attenuated, racialized poverty—in essence, any major American metropolis. Anderson maintains that the "internal order" systematized in the code of the streets involves a struggle for individual respect and acknowledgement—a logical pursuit given the profound societal stigma, marginality, and invisibility experienced by residents of the 'hood within the broader society. According to Anderson,

> At the heart of the code is the issue of respect—loosely defined as being treated "right" or being granted one's "props" (or proper due) or the deference one deserves. However, in the troublesome public environment of the inner city, as people increasingly feel buffeted by forces beyond their control, what one deserves in the way of respect becomes ever more problematic and uncertain. This situation in turn

[32] Such elisions can in part be attributed to the lamentable fact that few sociological "underclass" or urban poverty studies in the 1980s and 1990s were field-based ethnographies. Sociological critic Loïc J.D. Wacquant notes that only one of the 27 contributors to Christopher Jencks and P.E. Peterson's the widely influential *The Urban Underclass* (1991) conducted direct observation themselves, relying instead upon "measurements effected from a distance by survey bureaucracies utterly unfit to probe and scrutinize the life of marginalized populations (1997:346). Wacquant adds, "[r]emarkably, a mere handful of field studies of black inner-city life have appeared since the racial uprisings of the mid-1960s and even the few that have been published are more often than not overlooked" (346). Adding to that elision is the fact that expressive culture often proves too "soft" an object of study for sociologists, especially those seeking to influence public policy, which requires them to report "hard facts" about the inner city's fraying "hard structures."

> further opens up the issue of respect to sometimes intense interpersonal negotiation, at times resulting in altercations. In the street culture, especially among young people, respect is viewed as almost an external entity, one that is hard-won but easily lost—and so must constantly be guarded. The rules of the code in fact provide a framework for negotiating respect. With the right amount of respect, individuals can avoid being bothered in public. (1999:34)

The "code," then, exists as an internally coherent logic specific to 'hoodspace. Often referred to as "street knowledge" or being "streetwise," it is a system of rules, principles, and guiding concepts—at times, but not always, articulated in opposition to hegemonic and juridical norms—embraced by many 'hood residents in the belief that adherence to them will bring forth optimal personal outcomes. In delineating the code, Anderson goes far to deconstruct what sociological critic Loïc J.D. Wacquant calls a "century-old…tenet" in studies of race and poverty in U.S. cities: "the idea that the ghetto is a 'disorganized' social formation that can be analyzed wholly in terms of lack and deficiencies (individual or collective) rather than by positively identifying the principles that underlie its internal order and govern its specific mode of functioning" (1997:341).

The code of the streets clearly qualifies as what Michel Foucault describes as "subjugated knowledge," an antipode to institutionally legitimized truth claims, including "totalitarian theories" (1980:80) and "established regimes of thought" (81) in both the hard sciences and social sciences. (In the latter domain, Foucault points to Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and structuralism, particularly.) According to Foucault, "subjugated knowledge" actually stands for

> …a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task, or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity…what I would call a popular knowledge (*le savoir de gens*) though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a

> differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it. (1980:82)

Subjugated knowledges are historically specific, locally produced understandings of institutional power from the perspective of the dominated. For example, with regard to Foucault's own historical research on asylums, hospitals, and prisons, subjugated knowledge would be critical insights generated from the point of view of the "psychiatric patient," the "ill person," and the "delinquent," respectively (82). The latter comparison is highly relevant here, given a good number of hardcore hip-hop heads I spoke had clashed with the juvenile- and/or criminal-justice system at some point in their lives. In Foucauldian terms, then, the code of the streets works as an emic analysis of poverty in the 'hood, produced by residents themselves—rather than an etic attempt by social scientists to describe the ghetto using "totalitarian" academic theories.

Though Elijah Anderson does not specifically employ a Foucauldian "genealogical" approach, he largely succeeds in "disinterring" (Foucault 1980:85) the knowledge base encapsulated by the code of the streets. By emphasizing alternative social orders above disintegration, and competencies above incoherencies, he breaks open entrenched social-chaos theory established by his poverty-studies forerunners. Relative to my own observations, however, Anderson only partially "cracks" the code because he overstates the centrality of criminality and violence in conjunction with it. According to Anderson,

> …the code revolves around the *presentation of self*. Its basic requirement is the display of a certain predisposition to violence. A person's *public bearing* must send the unmistakable, if *sometimes subtle*, message that one is capable of violence, and possibly mayhem, when the situation requires it, that *one can take care of oneself*. The nature of this communication is determined largely by the demands of the circumstances but can involve *facial expressions, gait, and direct talk*—all geared

> mainly to deterring aggression. *Physical appearance, including clothes, jewelry, and grooming*, also plays an important part in how a person is viewed; to be respected, *it is vital to have the right look*. (1999:72, emphasis added)

In couching every activity as driven by "a predisposition to violence, possibly mayhem" (72), Anderson reinforces the overly exoticizing discourses of early social-scientific poverty studies that portray life in inner cities as radically aberrant, or pathologically deviant from middle-class norms. He also loses the sense of industrious, creative energy and "subtle" activity generated by the code.

In my experience, there seem to be four basic tenets to the "code," each serving the goal of earning respect and achieving personal success: 1) get money, 2) don't snitch, 3) handle your business, and 4) look fresh.[33] The latter two tenets—the more ambiguous and open-ended of the bunch—appear in Anderson's text using slightly different wording. For example, in the above quote, Anderson expresses "handle your business" as "one can take care of oneself" (1999:72), but I would argue this does not always imply aggression or fighting (though it can); rather, "handling business" can denote nothing more deviant than working hard and not depending upon others for assistance (a sentiment conservatives could embrace!). Anderson also suggests the tenet "look fresh" in the abovementioned quote, using the phrases "presentation of self," "facial

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[33] I heard the four tenets of the "code of the streets" uttered frequently by consultants, but only as separate refrains. As testament to my own outsider status within the 'hood, it never actually occurred to me there might be an encompassing system until, in a moment of Baudrillardian mediated reality, I watched a prepubescent-looking African-American teenager on television specify the four rules in an interview with Anderson Cooper on *60 Minutes*, as part of the anchorman's sensationalistic reporting on the so-called "Stop Snitching" campaign. In the words of Cooper's interviewee, a young man named Alex, the code's rules are: "don't back down from a fight, get money, hold your own, mind your business, don't snitch, look fresh." This report, entitled "Stop Snitchin'," originally aired on *60 Minutes* on April 22, 2007. It investigates the reluctance of African Americans in low-income urban areas to testify in court and cooperate with law enforcement as witnesses to criminal activity. The misguided report blames the phenomenon on the supposedly pathological, irrational values communicated in rap music rather linking it

expressions, gait, and direct talk," "[p]hysical appearance, including clothes, jewelry, and grooming," and "it is vital to have the right look (72). In foregrounding violence, however, Anderson misses some key distinctions. First, he underplays the importance placed upon style and artful expression in the code—those very cultural elements Robin D.G. Kelley implores scholars to do a better job attending to. Second, he neglects the significant ways the code resonates with mainstream, putatively wholesome American values, which influence the "habitus" (Bourdieu 1990) not just of hustlers and nefarious characters but of everyday folk in the 'hood.

While alarmists frame the code as an underworld instrument used to inculcate young people toward a life of crime and deviant behaviors, upon closer examination its precepts in many ways parallel the principles posited in the dominative "American dream" discourse—with a somewhat cynical edge, given 'hood inhabitants know full well that "dream" has long been deferred. Like the code of the streets, the "American dream" is a cohesive (if utterly fantastical and falsifiable) ideological system comprised of what political scientist Jennifer Hochschild details as "four tenets about achieving success"[34] (1996:15). Paraphrasing Hochschild, they are that 1) everyone can pursue success equally; 2) everyone can reasonably anticipate success (although there are no promises); 3) success results from actions and traits under one's own control; and 4) success is associated with virtue (and, conversely, failure implies sin) (1996:26-30). A

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to a warranted fear of retaliation as well as distrust of the legal system given the harsh legacy of police corruption and brutality in black communities.

[34] As to the meaning of "success," Jennifer Hochschild opines "People most often define success as the attainment of a high income, a prestigious job, economic security. My treatment is no exception. But…material well-being is only one form of accomplishment" (1996:15). Adding to this complexity, she avers "[d]ifferent kinds of success need not, but often do, conflict" (16). Hochschild argues that it is exactly this amorphous and elastic quality of the American dream that makes it "such an impressive ideology" (25).

foundational American myth, the American dream is intimately tied to the free-market and liberal-individualist ideologies espoused by Enlightenment thinkers such as Benjamin Franklin, John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, and the like.

So is, ironically enough, the code of the streets. Both discourses extol “rugged individualism,” embodied by mythical, heroic, and even antiheroic American figures: from pioneers, cowboys, outlaws, and rebels to gangsters, hustlers, ballers, and macks. Both place value on hard work and enterprise: the “Protestant work ethic,” reinterpreted as hustling and grinding and “handling business.” And both emphasize social mobility: hardcore rappers translate Horatio Alger-esque stories of self-made men into rags-to-riches tales of hustler “come-ups” and people “getting over.” The primary difference between the two discourses is one of tone: the blind optimism of the American dream versus the wary pragmatism of the code of the streets, whose tenet, “don’t snitch,” denotes a deep and warranted distrust of juridical and governmental institutions. In some ways the code of the streets can be understood as the dark side of the American dream, rearticulated through the nightmare of Reaganomics: the late 20th-century, early 21st-century reign of neoliberalism that has caused wider disparities between rich and poor than any other moment in American history. As Hochschild points out, “When people recognize that chances for success are slim or getting slimmer, the whole tenor of the American dream changes dramatically for the worse” (27).

Ghettofabulations

One should not overlook the lighter side of the code, however—the part associated with the qualities of creativity, aesthetics, pleasure, and play that Robin Kelley

foregrounds, which are intimated especially in the code's fourth tenet, "look fresh." Evident here is the importance of style or "swagger" within 'hoodspace—of sartorial as well as, by extension, verbal, musical, performative, and ornamental modes of expression that provide a primary means through which to earn respect, but which Anderson and other analysts typically dismiss or downplay. I argue that these artful practices animate hardcore hip-hop and are integral to 'hoodspace generally. For young people, the words, beats, dress, dance, and custom cars associated with hip-hop culture become the vehicles for establishing an overall "swag," defined roughly as the cool, admirably stylish manner with which one carries oneself in a heated and hazardous world.

In the Bay Area, 'hood swagger intersects with broader figurations common throughout hardcore hip-hop, embodied in the highly codified, masculinized performances, appearances, attitudes, and posturing associated with so-called "gangster," "thug," and "baller" rappers. I deploy the concept of "figuration" here, as John Hartigan, Jr. does in his studies of "white trash" and "hillbillies" (1999; 2005) to "call attention to the way people come to consider their identities in relation to potent images that circulate within a culture. Figuration is a drastic improvement over stereotype in that it captures the active way people subjected to certain debasing images are able to inhabit them in complex ways that involve critique and elaboration" (2005:16). The key figures of the hardcore-hip-hop formation—the "gangsta," which derives primarily from veteran Los Angeles rap acts N.W.A., Ice-T, and Snoop Dogg, and the "thug" and/or "baller," popularized by New York artists such as Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, and 50 Cent—all share in common a number of characteristics that people attempt to "inhabit." Chief among these is a cool and contained masculine comportment, driven by a preoccupation with

self-mastery, respect, and personal authority. Such orientations typically find expression either through verbal assertions or corporeal demonstrations of power in the form of conspicuous wealth, street bravado, and sexual prowess.

In Bay Area, all such qualities pertain, but they manifest in slightly looser, funkier, more idiosyncratic and ambiguous modes of expression relative to the more rigid behavioral and stylistic codes of L.A. gangsterism and New York thug rap—offering further evidence of the need to attend to “the particularity of local forms” (Stewart 1996:4) in studies of hip-hop and ‘hoodspace generally. As for the Bay Area’s eccentricities: perhaps it is something in the atmosphere, that peculiar Northern California mix of ocean air, auto exhaust, marijuana smoke, and oil refinery fumes. Although efforts to distinguish street-oriented rap from other putatively less “hardcore” styles of hip-hop occur just as frequently in the Bay Area as anywhere else on the global-rap mattering map, the region offers an especially hazy grey space for making such distinctions: firstly, because the scene is so remarkably diverse—not just demographically but also in terms of style—that local artists of all stripes frequently transgress and exceed established conventions to the point where new, regionally relevant cultural categories such as “hyphy,” “mobb,” “New Bay,” and “turf” are required; secondly, because local artists in both the hardcore and backpacker camps tout the concept of artistic and commercial “independence” equally emphatically, embracing their shared marginal position to the dominant rap-music industry, whose transnational

tentacles of circulation and influence ultimately trace back to the hip-hop "headquarters cities" of New York and L.A.—not the Bay.[35]

The Bay Area was only ever tangentially included in discussions of West Coast gangster rappers and their "beef" with East Coast thug MCs.[36] Neither San Francisco nor Oakland can be said to be leading industrial centers of rap music, given that no major music conglomerates station there. Both cities are, however, important trendsetting hubs where hip-hop innovation incubates, occasionally drifting into the main-streams of broadcasters such as MTV, BET, and the monopolistic media corporation Clear Channel Communications, which owns the majority of commercial "urban contemporary" (i.e. hip-hop and R&B) radio stations in the U.S. (including the only two in the Bay Area: KMEL 106.1FM and KYLD "Wild" 94.5FM). So while L.A. gangster-rap kingpin Suge Knight was busy trading barbs and blows with Puff Daddy and his New-York-based Bad Boy Records associates in the 1990s, the Bay Area's Too $hort, E-40, MC Hammer, and Digital Underground were "handling business," establishing an influential local swagger and self-supporting regional-rap infrastructure that set the stage for the region's subsequently high-profile hyphy movement.

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[35] Los Angeles and New York's bicoastal hip-hop monopoly has only recently begun to wane with the emergence of the "Dirty South" and its headquarters city of Atlanta as a significant commercial base of the global rap-music industry.

[36] The commercial ascendance of the subgenre of hardcore rap—centered around the competing geographic poles of Los Angeles and New York—reached a tragic, headline-grabbing climax in 1996 with the murder of L.A.-affiliated rapper Tupac Shakur and the subsequent retaliation slaying of NYC's Notorious B.I.G. Although both murders remain unsolved, and the motives for them are likely more complicated than a simple East Coast-vs.-West Coast "beef" among rappers (the reason attributed to the killings in most public discourse at the time), an undeniable rap-music rivalry formed between Los Angeles and New York in the 1990s that tended to overshadow all other regional hip-hop output in the U.S until the early 2000s, with the emergence of Southern-rap regional hotspots such as Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, Miami, and Memphis.

In Chapter Three I delineate hyphy poetics, framing it as a regionally unique manifestation of hardcore hip-hop swagger authored primarily by "Millennials" or "Gen-Y" youth from lower-income backgrounds—an age cohort 'hood inhabitants often refer to in tragicomic terms as the "crack baby generation" (parsed further in Chapter Seven). From materializing out of thin air, however, the hyphy movement evolved as part of a decades-long legacy of local hip-hop cultural production out of which emerged a series of figures, folk heroes, and fabulations that remain fundamental to 'hood identities asserted today; that legacy is itself historically tied to subcultural antecedents of previous generations, especially the West Oakland rhythm-and-blues and East Bay funk scenes discussed in Chapter One. In the following analysis leading up to a discussion on hyphy, I provide an overview of key Bay Area "ghettofabulations," focusing particularly on three overarching local hip-hop tropes: that of the "mack," the activity of "hustling," and selling music "out the trunk."

These tropes became integral parts of the local hip-hop iconography during a period spanning late 1980s and mid 1990s, when the Bay Area first received high-visibility "shine" (i.e. public spotlight) from outside pop-music cognoscenti. During this "mobb music" era, local hardcore rappers offered gritty cultural rejoinders to the concomitant "crack epidemic" spreading throughout U.S. inner cities. Alongside their gangster-rap peers in Southern California, a handful of Bay Area artists made a mark on the national hip-hop mattering map, gaining entry onto *Billboard's* mainstream music charts with hit releases. These performers included, most notably, E-40, The Click, Mac Mall, The Luniz, Spice 1, Rappin' 4-Tay, Dru Down, Ant Banks, RBL Posse, J.T. tha

Bigga Figga, Richie Rich, Whoridas, and 415.[37] One particularly prolific Bay Area recording artist, the iconic Oakland rapper Too $hort, even managed during that period to garner one gold record (*Born to Mack* 1988) and four subsequent platinum albums (*Life Is…Too $hort* 1989, *$hort Dog's in the House* 1990, *$horty the Pimp* 1992, *Get In Where You Fit In* 1993).

The Mack

In the mobb era, the aforementioned performers established a dominant figure in Bay Area rap that since gained widespread significance throughout hip-hop culture: that of the "mack." Hip-hop scholar Eithne Quinn analyzes the trope of the mack in hardcore rap, suggesting the word "mack" connotes secondary meanings beyond its literal denotation as a synonym for the noun and verb "pimp."[38] In addition to denoting a pimp, or someone who traffics in women as sexual commodities, "[t]he mack comes to mean the persuader, the trickster, the rapper," the street-heroic figure who has an unusual way with words (Quinn 2000:115). Understood as implicitly male, "the mack" figure in hardcore rap embodies the vaunted masculine qualities of sexual, economic, and verbal prowess—someone who can not only charm women but also make money simply by "smooth talking." Quinn locates what she calls "pimp poetics" within the longstanding

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[37] Some of the top-selling releases of this era include *Nu Niggaz on Tha Blokkk* (1991) by 415; *Down and Dirty* (1994) and *Game Related* (1995) by The Click; *Illegal Business* (1993) by Mac Mall; *187 He Wrote* (1993), *AmeriKKKa's Nightmare* (1994), and *1990-Sick* (1995) by Spice 1; "Captain Save a Hoe" (1994) and "Sprinkle Me" (1995) by E-40; "Playaz Club" (1994) by Rappin' 4-Tay; "Pimp of the Year" (1994) by Dru Down; *The Big Badass* (1994) by Ant Banks; *Ruthless By Law* (1994) by RBL Posse; "I Got 5 On It" (1995) by The Luniz; *Dwellin' in the Lab* (1995) by JT the Bigga Figga; "Let's Ride" (1996) by Richie Rich; and "Shot Callin' and Big Ballin'" (1996) by Whoridas.

[38] The word "mack" is "[s]hort for Mackerel man, a pimp. Possibly from the French *maquereau*. Connotes the working side of pimping, especially the line, the 'rap,' the psychological game" (Quinn 2000:115).

trickster narratives of the Afro-Diasporic verbal arts, traced famously by literary scholar Henry Louis Gates to the Yoruban legends of Esu-Elegbara, which he argues carry through to African-American folktales of the Signifying Monkey (Gates 1988). Robin D.G. Kelley as well as folklorist John W. Roberts and literary scholar Cecil Brown all connect these trickster tales to other forms of African-American popular culture that are key antecedents to rap music: to the "baaadman" category of blues songs such as "Stagger Lee" and the pulpy pimp-narrative fiction of Iceberg Slim (Brown 2003; Kelley 1996; Roberts 1990).

When understood literally in relation to the illicit practice of pimping, "macking" is inherently misogynistic, since the pimp exploits female sexual labor; they insinuate themselves into the lives of vulnerable young women, acting as manager and putative protector in exchange for the prostitute's earnings. Suggested in the ghetto adage "pimpin' ain't easy," pimps are regarded within the underworld as exceptionally charismatic individuals, verbally gifted with persuasive powers so potent that they are able to convince prostitutes to enter into exploitative relationships with them. As Quinn points out, in the case of some hardcore rappers, the "equivalence is literalized" between the rapper and the pimp (2000:115). As case in point she refers to Oakland's Too $hort, who stakes his entire hip-hop persona on his ability to "mack" and regularly refers to himself as "$horty the Pimp" in song lyrics and album titles. However, Quinn rightly points out that verbal equivalences asserted by hardcore rappers between themselves and macks or pimps refer not to the literal act of prostituting women but to "the little-documented indeterminacies and metadiscursive imperatives of pimp poetics. In all cases, those enigmatic figures seem to privilege style over substance, image over reality, word

over deed…the impulse is towards the substantiveness of style, and the performativity of language" (117).

Quinn's assertions about the "substantiveness of style" coalesces with my focus on the fabulatory and figurative aspects of 'hoodspace, where cultural meanings cannot always be taken literally. Although the figure of the mack or the pimp is obviously troubling for its suggestion of the sexual traffic in women, it must be understood—particularly within in hip-hop contexts—in more figurative terms, as the ultimate symbol of 'hood triumph or mastery over one's environment—someone able to "get over" limitations imposed by the ghetto and nevertheless achieve financial success. Flamboyant visual displays of success are essential to the identity of the mack, particularly with regard to dress and self-presentation. In video and photo shoots, hardcore Bay Area rappers often trade their everyday wear of baggy jeans and oversized t-shirts for resplendent pimp attire, which could include any or all of the following: flashy tailored suits, feathered fedora hats, fur-lined capes, dark glasses, and walking canes for strutting and making an entrance. These visual displays hearken back to urban (anti)heroes of 1970s blaxploitation films such as *Super Fly* (1972), *Black Cesar* (1973), and *Dolemite* (1975). Bay Area hip-hoppers point out with a sense of pride that one of the most influential works of blaxploitation cinema, *The Mack* (1973), was shot entirely in Oakland. The film centers around a flamboyant Oakland pimp and former drug dealer named Goldie (played by Max Julien), who outwits crooked white cops and a sadistic white crime boss to become an underworld kingpin. Among numerous notable elements of the film, *The Mack* features *cinema vérité* documentary footage of an actual "player's ball": a professional pimp convention in which macks from around the Bay Area gather

in Oakland to network, socialize, and strut their stuff; the film even captures the event's audacious awards ceremony, in which various individuals are awarded chalice-like "pimp cup" trophies, including one for "Pimp of the Year"!

Among nationwide audiences, *The Mack* established Oakland as ground zero for the gritty but also vividly stylish African-American underworld that male hardcore rappers consciously link themselves to, drawing on the figure of the mack as a source of personal power. As testament to the influential reach of Bay Area aesthetics and poetics, "Mac" or "Mack" is considered an honorific title for MCs throughout the hip-hop nation. Locally, two notable rappers ascribe overtly as macks in their choice of MC stage names: Mac Mall, a street-tough "mobb" MC from the San Francisco Fillmore District who remains relevant today, and Vallejo's Mac Dre, the late icon of local rap who many credit as the founder of the hyphy movement. In invoking this title, rappers construct imaginative lineages, sometimes to fictive mack and pimp characters and sometimes to true-life forefathers, as when hyphy artist Stanley Cox—better known as Mistah FAB—dedicates his sophomore album, *Son of a Pimp* (2005), to his father, a former working pimp who died of complications from A.I.D.S. in 1994. The album cover features a stylish photo of the elder Cox, dressed in an elegant long coat and side-cocked fedora, posing in front of a Cadillac with the Oakland skyline in the background.

Too $hort also asserts his mack status in the title of his debut album, *Born to Mack* (1987) and in numerous sexually explicit "dirty rap" song lyrics spanning his decades-long career. For these and other local rappers, being a mack does not mean you ever literally worked as a pimp, or even aspire to do so. Too $hort makes a clear distinction between his "true self," Todd Shaw (the name his mama gave him), and his

rap-music "character," which he consciously cultivates in order to remain marketable: "I take good care of my character, and you know, I watch what I say and what I do, but it's never been me. I don't think Too $hort has ever defined me, like, 'That's you.' I think I spent most of my adult life actually fighting the image so I could have a personal life, you know, when it comes time to deal with like family and friends or relationships" (personal communication).

The mack represents the most prestigious, glamorous model of masculinity available within Bay Area 'hoodspace. For most male rappers raised in those spaces, the mack is also viewed as the most marketable version of self to inhabit and perform, even if there is a cost to one's personal life, as is the case with Too $hort, who pushed the persona of the womanizing mack further than perhaps any rapper in the history of hip-hop. Fundamentally, though, the mack in hip-hop contexts does not represent radical sexual alterity; rather he stands simply an emblem of dominant heteronormative male identity, no more transgressive than the concept of the "big man on campus" or the high-school "jock" among white middle-class Americans—with a little bit of rebel-outlaw swagger thrown in. Too $hort sums up his identification with mack figures succinctly: "[I had] big dreams, you know? I was watching movies and watching real-life people, and going, 'That's what I want to do.' I wanted to be the cool guy with the pretty girls" (personal communication).

While on the surface $hort's assertion seems simple, a Baudrillardian subtext emerges in his simultaneous visual recollection of "watching movies" like *The Mack* (which he and numerous other rappers cite as an early influence) and "watching real-life people." He hints at the way in which 'hoodspace is itself as a kind of "simulacrum"

(Baudrillard 1995) in which distinctions between non-fiction and fiction, the real and the mediated, become blurred, particularly among hardcore rappers who trade in highly marketable street spectacles and ghettofabulations in song lyrics and accompanying visual media; at the same time they must continually "keep it real" by providing requisite nods to verifiable lineages of hardship—as with Mistah FAB and his pimp father—and actual places of danger—like Deep East Oakland in the case of Too $hort, San Francisco's Fillmore District in the case of Mac Mall, and Vallejo's downtrodden Crestside neighborhood for Mac Dre—in order to maintain respect, prestige, and street legitimacy.

Hustling

For hardcore rappers, linking oneself to early experiences of destitution and poverty proves significant, first, as a way to maintain connections with one's primary or original fanbase of hometown 'hood supporters and, second, as an important set-up scenario for the kinds of self-congratulatory come-up narratives that pervade hardcore hip-hop discourse. In such tales, young "hustlers" become all-American self-made men, pulling themselves up by their Timberland bootstraps, often by first working in the illicit black-market drug economy—a much more common avenue of economic mobility among young men from the 'hoods of Oakland, San Francisco, Richmond, and Vallejo than the somewhat taboo and rarified world of pimping.

Using the coded language of "hustling" and being "in the streets" or "on the corner," the majority of young African-American and Latino men from low-income neighborhoods that I spoke to suggested some personal experience—whether distant or

not-so-distant—with the black-market drug trade. Hustling is so ubiquitous within these communities, particularly among males, as to be banal. So are arrests, police grillings, and jail time as a consequence for engaging in such activities; residents refer to various entanglements with the criminal justice system as "catching a case," as if legal trouble could be transmitted through the air—an ironic though fitting description given the hazardous atmosphere of the 'hood.

Although rappers sometimes couch these activities in romanticized terms, as evidence of rugged-outlaw 'hood authenticity, most locals refer to it primarily as a means of survival, albeit a dangerous one. "Nobody's eating," was the explanation given for the 2006 surge in Bay Area drug-related violence given to me by Percy, a reformed "old-school" or "OG" (i.e. "original gangster") hustler who now works as an anti-violence counselor at Youth UpRising, the East Oakland nonprofit where I volunteered. By "nobody's eating," Percy suggests a heightened sense of desperation among low-income folks in general but, more specifically, between rival networks of turf-affiliated "clicks" that have dominated the street-level drug trade in Oakland since the late-1980s-early-1990s "crack epidemic." In a casual conversation with me, he hypothesized that it was not the profusion of drug-related activity but a supply-side disruption of available product from Latin America that actually pushed drug dealers to become more competitive and thus more violent.

Percy's practical-minded, non-judgmental outlook on the dynamics of the local drug trade reflects wider attitudes among his peers about the illicit economy, particularly among those hailing from the troubled neighborhoods of "Deep East Oakland," a.k.a. "the killing fields," where nearly half of all households fall below the national poverty

line. He does not condone such activity; his life's work centers around helping young people avoid such dangerous paths. However, he like many East Oaklanders and others from similarly "grimy" areas (the adjective used most often to describe rough-and-tumble 'hood spaces, people, and productions) view hustling not as social "pathology" of the kind proffered by some sociologists but as rational choice within the political economy of the 'hood, given the lack of alternative avenues for working-class youth born into the era of deindustrialization. Involvement in drug-related hustling proves especially tempting to "hungry" adolescent young men, who tend underestimate the risks posed by "the corner" and "the streets." According to Alexander tha Grate, a member of the Oakland hyphy rap crew The Trunk Boiz, "If you see somebody standing on the corner all day and then they come up, they pull up with a new car, a chain, nice watch…You gon want to do that. Why not? It seem like it's working for them, and all they do is stand! Shit, I could stand and start getting chains and stuff."

Riffing off the American dream discourse, "come-up" tales in which street-corner hustling becomes Horatio Alger entrepreneurialism appear with frequency in hardcore rap—not just in the Bay Area but throughout the U.S., from California to New York to the Midwest and the American South. Such narratives became popular during the late 1980s-early 1990s gangsta-rap era in Los Angeles, when gang-affiliated rappers such as Ice-T, Snoop Dogg, and Tupac Shakur inverted pathologizing "culture of poverty" discourses by "flipping the script," describing legitimate American institutions such as the federal government, law enforcement, and multinational corporations as aggressive and venal and every bit as corrupt as the Bloods, the Crips and the underground dope economy. In other such equations, gang leaders become folk heroes, CEOs sling

commodities like crack, the U.S. military commits drive-bys, and presidents are the biggest pimps of all.

The Bay Area has its own version of such flipside narratives and characters. Specifically in Oakland, the legend of real-life 1970s drug kingpin Felix "The Cat" Mitchell looms large in local 'hood mythologies. Famed for using the spoils of his heroin trade to fund youth sports leagues and community services (after outfitting himself with luxury cars, expensive jewelry, and million-dollar houses), Mitchell stands as a Robin Hood-like hero in local lore and beyond. He is referenced repeatedly in "mobb"-era rap songs, including tracks by E-40 and Yukmouth of the Luniz, who began his career as a dealer in Mitchell's East Oakland-based drug gang, the "6-9 Mob." (Felix Mitchell even served as inspiration for Nino Brown, the kingpin character played by Wesley Snipes in the New York-based action film *New Jack City* [1991]). When Mitchell died in prison in 1986, his funeral became a spectacle—a hero's welcome, for some—that drew thousands of mourners and bystanders to the Oakland streets to view Mitchell's garish horse-drawn hearse and limousine procession. The headline-grabbing public turnout shocked members of Bay Area "polite society," who were appalled that ordinary working-class citizens would lionize a convicted criminal. The behavior appeared "pathological" to members of the upper-middle class because, by then, in the post-civil rights, post-Black Power era, most had turned a blind eye to the pathological levels of disinvestment and neglect occurring within the region's most financially strapped minority neighborhoods, where drug dealing had become one of few well-paid occupations.[39]

[39] The notorious legacy of Felix Mitchell is documented in three key sources: an online profile by the Oakland civic-pride nonprofit Oaklandish (http://www.oaklandish.org/OAK/stories/felix.html); an internet

Similarly enshrined in the 'hood pantheon is Darryl "Lil' D" Reed, a nephew of Felix Mitchell who established a local cocaine empire during the 1980s. Incarcerated in 1988, Lil' D maintains iconic status among Bay Area hustlers and 'hood kids, most of whom weren't even born at the time of his imprisonment. I witnessed the significance of Lil' D directly one day in downtown Oakland, after attending a city council meeting in support of a number of acquaintances, who were there to testify to the continued importance of funding for anti-violence youth programming. After the meeting, a group of teens—mostly African-American but some Latino, mostly boys but some girls—gathered cheerfully on the City Hall steps, confident their presence had made an impact. A number of them wore large t-shirts emblazoned with the tagline "Go Smart!"—an inversion of the hyphy street-slang phrase, "go dumb," sometimes used to connote "wild" or risky behaviors like car stunts and drug use; the shirts were customized by The Mentoring Center, a nonprofit diversion program working with repeat juvenile offenders.

Feeling energized after the meeting, I decided to head across the street to the De Lauer Newsstand in pursuit of another research-related agenda; I wanted to purchase a copy of *Don Diva*, a tabloid-ish magazine openly celebratory of urban underworld culture. I heard from some local kids that the latest issue featured a cover story on Lil' D. As I scanned through the shelves, it struck me how dissonant this task seemed from the civic-minded activities over at City Hall. Nevertheless, I knew it was the very same "at-risk youth" being served by violence-prevention programs like The Mentoring Center (and Youth UpRising, where I volunteered) who were most interested in Lil' D's story—

documentary short about Mitchell, also produced by Oaklandish (http://www.oaklandish.com/VIDEO/felix3.html); and an episode of the popular BET series *American*

so interested that, according to the shopkeeper, the issue had flown off the shelves. "A bunch of young guys came in and right away bought up all the issues," the fifty-something man informed me while looking at me incredulously. "You don't seem like the type of person who would buy that." When I told him it as part of a research project, he offered his own commentary: "Minorities, or blacks, are too fixated on money and bling," he said as he glanced peripherally out the window at the group of young African-American men perennially "posted up" in front of the store, who he claimed intimidated customers and clogged up foot traffic.

Although the shopkeeper himself was of African ancestry—he told me he had emigrated from Ethiopia some years back—he clearly did not identify with any notion of American "blackness," nor was he particularly sympathetic to the predicament of the aspiring Lil' Ds outside his window. Despite the Afro-Diasporic connection and shared working-class status of the corner boys and shopkeeper (who was a hired employee, not a business owner), there appeared a vast gulf between them—generationally, nationally, racially, and culturally. Their estrangement echoes Paul Gilroy's critique of African-American youth culture or, more specifically, 'hood-based hyperlocalism in hardcore rap, which he claims inhibits young people from realizing a more "mobilized cultural politics of race" based upon identification with a cosmopolitan and potentially more powerful Black Atlantic formation (2004). But the estrangement flowed both ways, with the shopkeeper no more recognizing any shared cultural inheritance or common economic interests than the corner boys did of him.

Gangster on Mitchell (2007).

The cultural disconnect between young people and older generations—including African-American elders—was often raised as a problem by hip-hop-head consultants, especially those involved in various youth-development and outreach programs. One of the most biting critiques came from Adisa Banjoko, an outspoken journalist, activist, and hip-hop "organic intellectual," who finds it hypocritical when old-guard black leaders rail against "vulgarity" in hip-hop, as when Al Sharpton and the NAACP attempted in 2007 to "bury the n-word,"[40] when "that same generation gave birth to Richard Pryor, gave birth to Red Foxx, gave birth to Millie Jackson, gave birth to Dolemite and all of the stuff that rappers use in records now! So don't be like 'these youngsters are going out of their mind.' Hey, isn't that Red Foxx on in the background?"

According to Banjoko, the attraction of young Oakland hustlers and hardcore hip-hop heads to real-life 'hood figures such as Felix Mitchell and Lil' D differs little from the widespread intergenerational allure of flamboyant fictional characters such as Dolemite and Goldie from *The Mack* as well as, I would add, more mainstream white antiheroes in American popular culture, from Scarface to Dirty Harry to Billy the Kid. Hustlers and macks hold particular appeal in Bay Area 'hoodspace not because of their "predisposition to violence" (Anderson 1999:72) but because their business savvy allowed them to transcend the corners and lead ghettofabulous (if often short) lives; they are American "rugged individualists" *par excellence*. This veneration of street-level entrepreneurs differs somewhat from the valorization of gun-toting thugs in L.A. gangster

[40] In 2007, after the scandal caused by radio shock jock Don Imus' racist comments about the mostly black Rutgers University women's basketball team, Al Sharpton and the NAACP held a public "funeral" for the n-word in an effort to quell its use in the African-American community.

rap.[41] In the Bay Area it is less about living by the gun and more about the pursuit the almighty dollar, the materialist basis of the American dream. Precisely what commodity is being sold seems immaterial. Crack, weed, jokes, dirty raps—all are simply widgets, units of production invested with exchange value that can propel individuals into the game, allowing them to become players. Ultimately the term "hustling" signifies not just drug dealing but any kind of capitalistic activity, whether underground or over-ground.

Out the Trunk

If hustling is understood as a synonym for labor—preferably of the self-employed, unalienated, venture-capital kind—then Todd "Too $hort" Shaw undoubtedly holds a prominent place in the Bay Area hustler's pantheon of Felix Mitchell (who is deceased), Lil' D (who is serving a prison term), and *The Mack*'s Goldie (who is fictional). More than these other icons, Too $hort straddles the realms of fact and fiction, as both an invented persona and a behind-the-scenes businessman. $hort's early career is the stuff of legend, referenced frequently by young hip-hoppers, male and female alike, as a model for "gettin' it." The Bay's repute as a hotbed of underground hustle in fact began with Too $hort, who in the mid 1980s established the underground business practice of selling homemade albums on the streets, in the back of buses, and "out the

[41] Although Bay Area hardcore rap shares a fixation with L.A. gangster rap on larger-than-life underworld bosses, local insiders are quick to point out that gangsters and gangland dystopias figure much less prominently within local 'hoodscapes described in Bay Area rap, particularly with regards to Oakland. They attribute this to the fact that Oakland bosses like Felix Mitchell and Lil' D had their game wrapped up so tight (i.e. they worked with such efficiency and mastery) that, for decades, they were able to keep the L.A.-based mega-gangs that control much of California's street-level drug traffic—the Bloods, the Crips, the Norteños, the Sureños, 18th Street, and MS-13—out of Oakland. Only recently have the Norteños and Sureños established a significant presence in Latino neighborhoods such as Oakland's Fruitvale District and San Francisco's Mission.

trunk” of cars. Stocked with mixtapes and cassettes, $hort and his associates rolled regularly through Oakland neighborhoods and swap meets in old Cadillacs, Buicks, and Oldsmobiles, which became mobile retail shops.

In addition to launching these homespun street-marketing teams, one of $hort’s more ingenious schemes was to target market specialty-rap songs to drug dealers, who he describes the only people on the block with enough money to pay for the customized tracks he would compose depicting his clients as heroic, larger-than-life characters.[42] With guerilla marketing savvy and drug dealers as primary investors, Too $hort managed to make a name for himself and sell over 50,000 copies of his independently-produced sophomore album, *Born to Mack* (1988), before even inking his first major-label deal with Jive Records; the album subsequently went gold despite receiving virtually no commercial-radio airplay. From this rose a whole local mythology fashioning the Bay Area as one of the most prodigious and industrious regional rap scenes—one nevertheless historically overlooked by corporate gatekeepers because of their bi-polar fixations on New York and Los Angeles (with the South just recently making headway).

As a result of Too $hort’s successful early endeavors, circulating music “out the trunk” became another local discursive trope, a metonym for hand-to-hand, street-level music marketing, sales, and distribution practices that exist outside the workings of corporate cultural industries—a proud refusal of or sidestepping around the limitations placed upon cultural producers by entertainment conglomerates. Doing business “out the trunk” epitomizes the much-vaunted do-it-yourself “hustler ethos” or “independent spirit”

[42] Interestingly, this practice directly parallels the work of numerous Mexican *narcocorrido* balladeers, who pen off-market customized songs for cartel bosses (Morrison 2008; Simonett 2001; Wald 2001).

that local hip-hop heads cite as one of the primary distinctive qualities of the local scene, and that resonates so strongly with the broader "American dream" discourse. Anita Johnson, a public-radio DJ who co-hosts the influential hip-hop program "Hard Knock Radio," explains this orientation in relation to the broader music industry:

> Obviously there were doors that were not open to us. We didn't have a level of access to what L.A. rappers received. You know, the spotlight was not on the Bay Area. But I think the hustling spirit of "You know what, I'm gonna do for self…I'm gonna create my own label and basically profit independently."…[T]he nation really doesn't explore that angle or aspect of the hyphy movement. A lot of these artists have received recognition basically off of them being entrepreneurs and go-getters and really seriously hustlers. People like Keak the Sneak, who is the creator of the word "hyphy." He's still independent. He sells most out of the Bay. He sings it in his song: "Who's the most sold in the Bay? Me. Independent with no video? Me," you know what I'm saying? He sells the most with basically no radio play, no access to video, no major record label backing him and pushing him out in these different markets. But yet he's not just known in the Bay Area. He's known throughout the United States and most likely throughout the world. That's the spirit of the Bay Area. (personal communication)

East Oakland native Casual, an underground rapper in the renowned Hieroglyphics hip-hop crew, similarly attributes this do-it-yourself orientation to a street mentality common throughout the region: "In the Bay Area, what they teach you from being a young man is get a penny out of anything. Like, 'Yo, if you can sell penny candy for two cents, then you just doubled your money.' I mean, that's how I grew up. Everybody telling you how to make something out of nothing. I took a lot of my artistic swagger from the Bay, the individualism." Casual emphasizes how street rappers do business without actually owning much in the way of material resources, or having access to industrial means of production. Like the "mack," Casual suggests, rappers turn a profit simply through smooth talking:

> I mean, think about it, when it comes down to rap music…it's not tangible. You can't touch a song, you know what I'm saying? So someone is really selling you something that one of your senses can enjoy, but it's not really [a thing]…And so, we're making something out of nothing when we're rhyming, if I can go say some shit that you could buy and think "oh, that's hot." (personal communication)

This propensity for being business-minded, this tendency toward hard-work ethics and goal-oriented activities, goes unrecognized by the majority of Bay Area moral authorities, the public officials and "concerned citizens" who overlook these extremely conventional, all-American ideologies of Bay Area 'hoodspace and hardcore rap and instead focus on the most transgressive, illicit, and putatively "disrespectful" elements of local urban youth culture: playing music at loud decibels, performing dangerous car stunts, fighting at concerts and informal gatherings, cursing repeatedly, and—perhaps the most legitimate criticism of all—penning misogynist rap lyrics. For outsiders to the local hip-hop community, it is easy to dismiss mobb music and the hyphy movement because they demonstrate these more troubling aspects of the hardcore-rap formation. But for an insider like Anita Johnson, a politically active African-American hip-hop head from a working-class East Oakland neighborhood, criticisms coexist alongside deeply felt "affective alliances" (Grossberg 1992:80); the two senses of things are hardly mutually exclusive. Johnson describes her sense of connection to hip-hop—even in its "grimy" hardcore manifestations—as an extension of self: "I have love for hip-hop, so therefore I have love for the product of that, the people that are in that because I'm part of that. If I tell myself I don't like it and I shouldn't like it, there's a part of me saying I don't like myself. My whole thing is like 'how can I work with it, how can I critique it to help it get better?' It's about healing. Cuz if it heals, I heal." She later frames hip-hop as loved one:

"It's like a child, you know what I'm saying? It's like your best friend. You know, 'I love you but what you said to so-and-so, what you did to me as a woman is wrong.'"

For Johnson and many others I spoke to, wholesale dismissal of hip-hop culture would be tantamount to self-hatred or painful alienation from those closest to you. Johnson therefore views negative feedback from outside of hip-hop culture, particularly from older-generation adults—whites and African Americans alike—as painfully out of touch and insensitive to the complex, often contradictory worldviews of the "hip-hop generation" to which she belongs. Criticisms couched in terms of political correctness and the "bad politics" of today's youth do little to engage her in the kinds of intergenerational, inter- and intra-racial, and cross-class dialogues that she feels would benefit herself, her peers, and society as a whole: "I would appreciate if my elder came to me and really had a genuine conversation about the word 'bitch,' 'nigga,' so on and so forth. I have issues with 'bitch' but I still say it. I'm a hypocrite too."

Grimed Out

Women artists often find themselves conflicted when attempting to carve out a space for themselves in the local scene, particularly when working in the hardcore-rap formation. Although women and girls participate, often it is in supporting roles as dancers, backup singers, or in background promotional roles, with the male MC standing at center stage. The equivalency drawn between street rappers and the privileged masculine identity of the "mack" leaves little room for women to maneuver. If they attempt to become hardcore MCs, they find themselves caught in a gender-binary bind. Kandi, a 19-year-old East Oakland rapper, claims that "as a female artist, it's like I have

to be able to have that tough image and that sexy image… It's like a double standard. You know, I gotta work twice as hard…you can't be too tough cuz then you're not sexy but you can't be too sexy because then they don't take you seriously—nobody's gonna respect you as a rapper" (personal communication). A slightly older and more established MC, San Francisco's Melina Jones, observes that women rappers attempting to establish themselves in the "street" idiom often take on masculine attributes. In the overtly (hetero)sexually charged realm of hardcore rap, women frequently feel the need to de-feminize or symbolically neuter themselves through masculinized gender performances. According to Jones, women MCs often

> kind of grime themselves out…in terms of their package or whatever. They're tomboyish, they're rockin' a doo-rag with some baggy pants, or they're really trying to sound like a dude…So when somebody sees a woman that is rocking a doo-rag and some baggy jeans and she's all fatigued out, they think she's probably not a singer, she's more of an MC… (personal communication)

Jones herself embraces a more conventionally "feminine" style of self presentation. In her own words, "I'm really comfortable with my femininity. I play dress-up. I invest in hella make-up. Lip gloss is my best friend, OK. I like long hair and I love being a girl. I love being a woman." Because of this, she reports that most people initially assume she is an R&B vocalist, a role that is much more feminized within the sphere of urban music. In his discussion of "the singerly" in hip-hop music, John L. Jackson parses "the high-stakes implications of the singing/rapping distinction" (2005:183), theorizing it "as a division of labor within hip-hop music that has powerfully productive force. For hip-hop, this seemingly harmless divide underpins many of the mechanisms powering hip-hop's most defining elements—policing categories of race and sexuality" (182). Within hip-hop's highly gendered and racialized division of labor, women are encouraged to vocalize as

backup singers or R&B soloists; likewise, the elemental arts of DJing, b-boying, and graffiti are all open to Latinos, Asians, and whites, but the privileged role of MCing remains heavily guarded as a realm of black males, infiltrated only occasionally by women and members of other races who are deemed exceptionally talented.

During my fieldwork, I met numerous aspiring young female MCs working within the hardcore idiom who were attempting to break into the 'hood-rap game, despite its challenges and limitations. Yet so far only one local female street rapper has ever received widespread acclaim—Suga T, a member of E-40's mobb-era supergroup the Click. Given hardcore Bay Area rappers' heavy reliance on hypermasculine "pimp poetics," perhaps this dearth of female MCs is unsurprising. In the world of the mack, women appear primarily as nameless members of an entourage, hanging on the man's arms as an appendage, an accessory, set dressing. In response to questioning about the inherent misogyny of such imagery, many hardcore hip-hoppers respond simply with the marketing adage "sex sells"—not just in the 'hood, but among suburban white young men who comprise the majority of rap music's U.S. consumer base. Economic imperatives trump progressive gender politics.

However, Bay Area hardcore hip-hop never stays wholly confined to the rigidly defined codes of conduct for gangsters and hustlers, nor are its performers driven solely by the short-term profit logic of capitalism. Hip-hop is serious business, but it also provides space for play, for leisure, and for exuberant expression, embodied in the flashy aurality, orality, and physicality of the hyphy movement and the figure of the mack. Before hyphy even emerged, Bay Area hip-hop had already exhibited a uniquely mackedelic swagger or style, distinguishable from other urban music scenes for the

goofy, funky, smoked-out eccentricity of its artists, most of who tended to exceed strict definitions of gangster rap in terms of both lyrical content and image. Whereas for mainstream gangster or thug rappers such as Dr. Dre and 50 Cent, self-presentation centers around qualities of masculine coolness and hardnosed authority, early Bay Area rappers favored a more giddy, funky, psychedelically addled approach, evident in the slightly off-kilter swagger of the weed-obsessed Luniz (pronounced “loonies”), the clown-like comportment of ecstasy pill-popping Mac Dre, the multisyllabic mumbo-jumbo of E-40, the cartoonlike characters of Digital Underground, and even the harem-pants hustle MC Hammer.

Certainly not immune to the gritty logic of the streets, Bay Area hardcore rappers abide by a more ludic, absurdist expressive paradigm that takes itself slightly less seriously than gangster rap. Manifested visually, it is the difference between a Starter-sweatshirt-wearing, AK-47-toting gangster and a silk-suited, jewel-bedecked mack—a smooth operator as well, but one who nevertheless indulges in outlandish displays of individual style. Too $hort refers to this as the Bay Area hip-hop’s legacy of “comical gangsterism,” which he explains in terms of interplay between being “rough” and being “silly”:

> If you go to a little backstreet party in the Bay, or even one of the main clubs, and you play local music for an hour straight, you’ll see real tough-looking people, guys and girls. They might be sort of gangster and they might be acting real silly and dancing. You know, at the same time that it’s fun, it’s also kinda rough. You gotta be able to hold your own in there. Things can happen. You could get on the dance floor and bump into somebody wrong. You’re thinking you’re doing what they’re doing, and you end up getting yelled at and maybe into a fight. You can get caught up in the middle of a group of people going stupid and get one upside your head, you know? (Davey D 2006).

It is this legacy of “comical gangsterism,” or what I have previously referred to as mackedelics, that the hyphy movement extends from, and that I will attempt to detail in the following chapter.

Chapter Three

Clownin' on Capitalism: The Hyphy Movement and the Carnivalesque

In the years leading up to my field work, I noticed a strange new word had crept into the local slang lexicon. That word was "hyphy" (pronounced "hi-fee"), and by 2004 it appeared frequently throughout the public sphere, on concert bills nailed to lampposts, in headlines of alternative-press articles, and on the tips of young people's tongues. Explained as either an abbreviation of "hyperactive" or a condensation of the hip-hop slang terms "hype" and "fly," "hyphy" came to designate a whole range of popular practices, often controversial, that span five interrelated subcultural domains: music, dance, clothing, slang, and cars. Within each domain, key elements emerged: 1) music rhythmically grounded in bass-heavy beats known as "slaps"; 2) an urban dance craze known as "turfing" as well as a signature head bob described as "going dumb" or "shakin' dem dreads," 3) an extensive slang lexicon notable for novel verb phrases such as "thizzing," "flamboasting," "tycooning," and "ghostriding the whip"; 4) audaciously outfitted customized cars and known as "scrapers," used to perform dangerous car stunts at illegal "sideshow" gatherings; and 5) whimsical fashion inspired by hippie, Rasta, rave, skateboarder, and punk-rock subcultures as much as conventional hip-hop style.

With is emphasis on idiosyncratic feel-good phenomena, the hyphy movement represents one particularly spectacular manifestation of a shared affective sense of things in Bay Area hip-hop and, arguably, much more widely within the entire region. This sense registers primarily around notions of "difference" relative to dominant American

society, articulated most commonly within the region as an embrace of eccentricity, quirkiness, eclecticism, heterogeneity, and nonconformity—people who are freewheeling, open-minded, somewhat peculiar, and a little off-kilter. This affective atmosphere has animated all kinds of cultural configurations in past eras, from the Barbary Coast bohemia of the Gold Rush to, a century later, the acid rock, urban soul, New Left, and Black Power movements described in Chapter One. Today these "ordinary affects" (Stewart 2007) fuel the alternative lifestyles of, for example, Castro District drag queens, Berkeley vegan anarchists, Marin New-Agers, Silicon Valley cyberpunks, and Oakland hyphy hip-hoppers, to name just a few. All bohemias are not created equally, however. Subcultural practices engaged in by bourgeois whites generate far less alarm than something like the hyphy movement, a cultural formation associated primarily with African-American youth from some of the Bay Area's most troubled low-income locales.

Since street sensibilities and 'hoodspace imaginaries heavily influence the stylized modes and media associated with hyphy, in some ways it can be understood as a regionally unique offshoot of hardcore hip-hop, authored primarily with "Gen-Y" youth from gritty Bay Area 'hoods—young people born during the "crack epidemic" and gangster-rap explosion of the late 1980s and '90s; locals often refer to this age cohort as the "crack baby generation" (a tragicomic designation discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven). But as a post-"gangsta" phenomenon, hyphy breaks the hardcore-rap mold in numerous ways; namely, in its affective emphasis on playful performance over power moves, wild abandonment over self mastery, and insouciant expression over tough-guy triumph. Such "structures of feeling" (Williams 1978) are cultivated through a range of activities that can best be described as "carnivalesque" (Bakhtin 1984):

everything from psychotropic-fueled partying to dangerous “sideshow” car stunts to spastic dancing described in local vernacular as “getting hyphy,” “going dummy retarded” or “riding the yellow bus” (i.e. the gesticulations of someone requiring Special Education or in some way impaired).

Within hyphy, the kinds of heavily censured activities characterized as “acting a fool” in African-American speech communities—behaving irrationally, outrageously, bizarrely, or inanely, “losing one’s cool” or “wilding out”—become momentarily permissible. Hyphy offers a space for intentional foolery and for clowning. This includes “clowning on” others, a phrase often used by hip-hoppers to describe the kinds of comically virtuosic “signifyin’” and “snapping” acts executed by the clever and subversive “trickster” (Gates 1989). But being hyphy also implies becoming the clown or the fool, embodying foolishness rather than merely exposing and exploiting it, as the trickster does. Rather than hovering above in the trees, like the Signifying Monkey (Gates 1989:55), it involves being down in the thick of it, in the muck, through embodied immanence rather than intellectual transcendence. Hyphy emphasizes what Bakhtin characterizes as the “debased,” “degraded,” and “grotesque” performances of the carnival that, far from being demoralizing or dehumanizing, are actually highly generative. According the Bakhtin, to degrade is to bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh” (1984:20). He elaborates,

> “Downward” is earth, “upward” is heaven. Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts)… Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. (21)

Strikingly for such a ludic subculture, the hyphy movement emerged at a deadly serious moment of urban crisis. Between 2004 and 2007, the Bay Area experienced an alarming spike in violent crime, evident in the region's largest cities and in numerous working-class suburbs. In the hyphy hotbed of Oakland, a city where young African-American and Latino men are twice as likely to go to prison as college (Davis 1998:417), the murder rate increased to harrowing levels rivaling those of the late 1980s-early 1990s "crack epidemic"; by 2007 the city had the fifth-highest violent-crime rate in the nation.[43] Across every other indicator, Oakland offers a hazardous environment for young people to grow up in. Its public school system is the lowest performing in the state of California. Twenty-four percent of youth attending high school in the Oakland Unified School District drop out before graduating—well over twice the county and state rates (Witt et al. 2001:58). Nearly one out of every three children lives in poverty (Murgai 2004:14). Homicide is the leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 24 (Murgai 2004:25). Young black and Latino men are most frequently charged with violent crimes, they are also most frequently the victims. The latter fact rarely receives mention in

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[43] Source: http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2007/. Much is made of this ranking in the news media (Bulwa 2006) and "blogosphere" (see Pine 2007). However, the F.B.I. itself cautions against ranking cities on its own website: "Each year when Crime in the United States is published, some entities use reported figures to compile rankings of cities and counties. These rough rankings provide no insight into the numerous variables that mold crime in a particular town, city, county, state, or region. Consequently, they lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting communities and their residents. Valid assessments are possible only with careful study and analysis of the range of unique conditions affecting each local law enforcement jurisdiction. *The data user is, therefore, cautioned against comparing statistical data of individual reporting units from cities, metropolitan areas, states, or colleges or universities solely on the basis of their population coverage or student enrollment*" (emphasis in original).

widespread circulating discourses about an "out of control" population of youth in constant need of discipline, suppression, policing, and containment.[44]

It is no coincidence that Oakland and other similarly troubled areas in the Bay Area are precisely where hyphy culture flourished during those years. As such, hyphy can be framed as both a "reflection of" and a "response to" such dire conditions of existence: high crime rates and other related social factors including job flight, intergenerational poverty, defunded social services, and the criminalization of low-income youth. One could read hyphy's "wild" affect, and its participants' predilection for madcap antics and seemingly "out of control" expressive excess as a symbolic reflection of neoliberalism unbound, wherein *lumpen* and laboring classes are left to fend for themselves, literally fighting over the scrapheap of a globally expansive, flexibly accumulative capitalistic system structured upon the exploitation of the poor. Or one could read hyphy's unruly aesthetics as a more overtly defiant response to such conditions, using transgressive gestures to contest the institutional forces working to contain, police, subjugate, and devitalize disenfranchised populations.

In the following analysis, both explanatory frames prove useful, but they are not the final word. I do not want to reduce hyphy to a superstructural byproduct of a late-capitalist material base, or an imaginative attempt to "resolve" class antagonisms—the analytical end-game in more orthodox Marxian cultural critique (Jameson 1981). Such explanations would fail to encapsulate its quirky, erratic exuberance—the sense of fun, pleasure, and play that Robin D.G. Kelley implores inner-city ethnographers to better

[44] East Bay journalist J. Douglas Allen-Taylor provides extensive coverage of such sentiments, as they manifest in policing and public policy, in several local publications. This collected series of articles can be

attend to (1997:35). Likewise, I want to avoid overdetermining hyphy's ambiguous meanings and unpredictable affects according to a "seamless narrative of resistance" (Limón 1994:10), as is the tendency in classical cultural-studies analyses (Fiske 1989; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Willis 1977). To this end, I focus on questions of the "how" and "what" of hyphy more than the "why": How does it work? What does it do to and for people? How is it able to "affect and be affected" (Stewart 2007:2) by participants and broader publics? Trying to explain the more confounding ontological question of precisely *why* this specific "articulation" (Althusser 1969) of culture, social relations, economics, and politics coalesced at this particular historical moment proves untenable; it assumes cultural formations relate to broader social structures in predictably straightforward, coherent ways—ways that can ultimately be pinned down and explained away by the astute critic. According to Stuart Hall, the relationship between the cultural and the socio-material is rarely so clear-cut: "We cannot thereby deduce…the relations and mechanisms of the political and ideological structures…exclusively from the level of the economic…It requires us to demonstrate—rather than to assume *a priori*—what the nature and degree of 'correspondence' is, in any historical case" (1996:330).

Hyphy is particularly hard to pin down through traditional literary or semiotic modes of interpretation because, for one, most of the performances and productions associated with it do not translate easily as "texts" to be "read," much less offer literal meanings; even in the textual realm of song lyrics, hyphy MCs seem less concerned than conventional hardcore rappers with representing "the real" in any clearly mimetic sense. The very notion of "hyphy" itself is fundamentally polysemic, even paradoxical. It carries

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accessed at http://www.safero.org/sideshows.html.

the contradictory connotations of, on the one hand, fun, pleasure, and play and, on the other, wildness, aggression, and violence. Oakland native Ise Lyfe explains how its meaning has expanded over time:

> When I was growing up, when you said hyphy it just meant you was kind of wild and trippin', like the guy at the bar that for no reason, somebody just steps on his shoe, and he starts yellin'. He get hyphy. But now it's something that's used as positive. I think hyphy is revolutionary in principal, which is ironic…because the commercial side of it is dumb as fuck. But the other side of it, "I'm gonna grow these locks," "Jesus Christ had dreads so shake 'em."[45] What they're saying is this is like an Afrocentric culture. And when they talk about "I'm gonna jump on a car, I'm gonna kick a car," all of that dancing, the anger, it comes as a response to young people that are being ignored. Sideshows happen because there's no fucking rec. centers in Oakland that are worth anything...So, I also respect it for that.

By and large, hyphy expressions register in affective rather than symbolic or representational terms, and thus require posing different kinds of analytical questions. According to anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, this means asking "not what they might mean in an order of representations, or whether they are good or bad in an overarching scheme of things, but where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance" (Stewart 2007:3).

Hyphy is also difficult to grasp because the "movement" itself was ephemeral and fleeting. Strictly speaking, it only flourished for a short time, surfacing in 2003 and reaching its apex in 2006, shortly before being declared "dead" by journalists a year or two later (Arnold 2007; Arnold 2008a; Liu 2007; Meline 2007). But hyphy warrants close attention because it made an undeniable impact on the local hip-hop scene and highlighted what is actually a durable set of local hip-hop poetics, politics, and practices

that, for the most part, preceded their codification under the rubric of a “movement” and continue to endure. Moreover, hyphy crystallizes important unresolved tensions endemic to hardcore hip-hop broadly, expressed in uniquely local terms: tensions around the protection and policing of youth, who are perceived as either innocent or menacing in relation to certain racial and class anxieties; tensions around access to private property and uses of public space, heightened by the persistence of racialized poverty and inner-city disinvestment in some locales and gentrification and displacement in others; and tensions around legitimate leisure and labor practices in the context of deindustrialization, job flight, and expanding informal economies.

In order to highlight these tensions, I explore hyphy’s idiosyncratic “structure of feeling,” which I pose loosely as a tendency toward semiotic excess—toward amplified, expansive, spectacular, oftentimes absurdist expressions that frequently transgress socially codified norms and circumscribed racial and spatial limits. To give shape to this argument, I focus on how these transgressions and/or excesses manifest in three key experiential registers: that of space, time, and the body. By space, I refer to the fact that so many of the cultural practices associated with hyphy involve attempts by young people from ghettoized neighborhoods—communities marked by concentrated poverty and limited property ownership—to lay claims on public space through, for example, spontaneous sidewalk dancing, impromptu sideshow gatherings, and thunderous auto sound systems audible from miles away. In terms of time, I remark on the ways hyphy blurs the capitalist division of human temporality into discrete periods of labor and

[45] “Jesus Christ had dreads so shake ‘em” is the opening lyric to the E-40 hit song, “Tell Me When to Go” (Warner Bros. 2006), which catalogues the hyphy movement’s key elements for a broader audience.

leisure, since many of the rituals and practices associated with it qualify as both work and play, enterprise and recreation (Kelley 1997:45); more specifically, making music and customizing cars, bikes, and clothing are all imaginative ways to have fun but also potentially make money within 'hoodspace environments offering few conventional outlets for gainful employment and wealth accumulation. With regards to the body, I refer to hyphy's unusual physical performances, bodily comportments, and stylized presentations of self—including the most marked acts of "getting hyphy" or "going dumb"—as a form of "racial kinesics" (Jackson 2005:16), notable as much for the ways they *do not* comport with conventional embodiments of race, class, gender, and sexuality in hardcore hip-hop as much as they do; in other words, whereas street-rap identities are overdetermined as menacing, masculine, and black, hyphy is something altogether more ambiguous.

Fundamentally, hyphy poetics can be characterized in terms of carnivalesque excess and uncontainable motion. According to literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, the "carnival celebrate[s] temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (1984:10). "Carnivalesque" cultural forms foreground excess, irreverence, parody, and the profane in order to destabilize these unjust yet entrenched social hierarchies (Fiske 1989:87). Applying Bakhtinian concepts locally, then, hyphy's young practitioners use carnivalesque forms of music, dance, talk, and visual style to challenge dominant American middle-class mores, pushing against socio-spatial limitations placed upon a population whose access to the "American dream" of social mobility is more attenuated than ever. Since hyphy poetics issue primarily from a young population

expected to “go nowhere” in terms of success and class advancement, it is telling that one key local slang phrase local youth use to heap praise upon someone or something is “that go!” In other words, it moves, it goes, it covers distance, it emits energy, it takes up plenty of space.

There is an element of the ironic at work here, however, since many of the expressive forms I characterize as “transgressive” also resonate with the more grandiose strains of the American ideological mainstream, particularly fixations in U.S. public culture on “rugged” (i.e. highly masculinized forms of) individualism, unfettered “free market” capitalism, and hyper-consumerism/commodity fetishism. Such obsessions manifest within hyphy in numerous forms: in a giant green dollar sign airbrushed on an extra-large white tee, or massive wheel rims so oversized they scrape against the bodies of otherwise banal American used cars (i.e. “scrapers”). Hyphy cultural forms highlight American excess often in such comically exaggerated, starkly juxtaposed terms that it appears as if the entire movement were an elaborate parody of the “American dream.” Better yet, hyphy can be viewed as a “reflection of” that hallucinatory dream viewed slightly askew, as if through a funhouse mirror. In order to see it, one has to swerve off the “free market” midway onto late-capitalism’s sideshow alleys, the place where hip-hop tricksters, jesters, and clowns hang out.

The following sections can be read as a kind of “tour” of those edgy spaces of American culture. Specifically, I emphasize six key subcultural domains—music, cars, fashion, slang, and dance—as primary sites where local hyphy heads employ carnivalesque aesthetics to animate everyday life and make things “go.”

Music

At first it sounds like a series of far-off explosions, or the rumblings of a Bay Area earthquake. As it gets closer, more sonorous elements emerge: deep-voiced chants, a symphony of synthesized strings and/or staccato piano, maybe a soulful female-sung chorus. Up close, you realize this mobile urban orchestra is literally quaking the vehicle carrying it—candy-painted cars whose metal frames vibrate with every low-frequency, stereo-emitted pulse. The car is a scraper, and the beats are called "slaps." Following a tradition begun in East Oakland, Bay Area urban audiophiles install massive subwoofers in automobile trunks, making rap music tactile as it rattles both metal and eardrums, sometimes to the point of physical damage. Some gearheads even mount speakers behind the front-end grill, projecting sound outward, imposing it upon a public, rather than keeping it private, inward, and interior, as car stereo was designed to do.

In addition to the term "slaps," locals refer to these bass-heavy beats—powerful enough to shake auto bodies and human ones—as "knocks," "claps," or "slumpers," slang words suggestive of both fistfight violence and strip-club carnality. It is the pulse that animates hyphy music, and can never be too loud or too low, echoing Bakhtinian emphases on the lower and bottom registers of debasement as a "coming down to earth" (1984:21). This predilection for pounding, bottom-heavy rhythms runs like a major artery, or a seismic fault line, connecting previous eras of Bay Area urban music, from hyphy to "mobb" rap all the way back to 1970s East Bay funk—itself an extension of the "raw" and "dirty" juke-joint sound associated with mid-century Oakland rhythm and blues. It is no coincidence that the signature sound of East Bay funk—the percussive

bass-playing technique invented by Oaklander Larry Graham—is referred to as "slap" funk (Vincent 1996:95).

Hyphy sonority additionally shares a lineage with Southern or "Dirty South" rap, also known for a car-thumping, drum-machine-powered sound referred to in the 1990s alternately as "Southern bounce" or "booty bass." More recently, hyphy frequently draws comparisons to the brash and buoyant "crunk" style of rap associated with the post-millennial Atlanta club scene; "crunk" is, in fact, a Southern slang term used similarly to "hyphy" as a synonym for wild, rowdy behavior. These cultural similarities are no coincidence. Most Bay Area African Americans trace their roots to the American South, given the massive migration of shipyard workers from the Gulf and Deep South regions during WWII. These sustained kinship networks and cultural ties manifest in hip-hop through circulatory flows of sounds, styles, artists, and fans.[46]

Most influentially, Too $hort relocated to Atlanta for a period during the 1990s, during which time he "discovered" crunk superstar Lil' Jon and gave the then-unknown artist his first big break doing music production and remix work.[47] At that point Lil' Jon began infusing Too $hort's sound with "crunk" aesthetics, including more uptempo rhythms and high-frequency techno-synth melodies derived from electronica-driven rave subcultures; in Too $hort's own words, Lil' Jon brought his sound "out the trunk and

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[46] For example, New Orleans rap impresario Master P began his career in Richmond, California, where he established No Limit Records—then a tiny retail shop and label—while living with his mother. During that time he gleaned independent game from mobb-era hip-hop entrepreneurs, including Too $hort and E-40. He brought Bay-style hustle back with him to Louisiana and subsequently became one of Southern rap's most commercially successful regional "crossover" figures (Forman 2002:336).

[47] Lil' Jon is credited with remix work on Too $hort's *Gettin It* (1996), vocal contributions on *Can't Stay Away* (1999), and production work on *More Freaky Tales* (1998) and *What's My Favorite Word?* (2002). Lil Jon's first song to receive national attention was his collaboration with Too $hort on the track "Bia' Bia'" (2001).

[into] the clubs" ("Too Short, Oakland OG" 2009). As crunk artists became hugely successful nationwide, other Bay Area rappers began following Too $hort's lead in the early 2000s, incorporating high-energy Southern-fried musical elements into their music. E-40 also pegged Lil' Jon to produce numerous tracks on his album *My Ghetto Report Card* (2006), which became a major pop hit. From this the hyphy sound emerged—a significant departure from the more laid-back beats of "mobb music" and "mack" rap in previous decades.

Still, hyphy tunesmiths such as Rick Rock, Traxamillion, E-A-Ski, and Droop-E continue to compose tracks with cars stereos mind. One act in particular even references auto acoustics in group name: the Trunk Boiz. Ironically, the Trunk Boiz are best known for vehicles of the two-wheeled variety: "scraper bikes"—refurbished used bicycles customized with neon paint jobs and decorative spokes (akin to those giant "ghettofabulous" car rims) made of bright reflective materials like vinyl, plastic, aluminum foil, even reclaimed candy wrappers. Trunk Boiz crewmember and scraper-bike inventor Baby Champ often wires stereos to the handlebars and speakers to the rear, resulting in a ludicrously lopsided vehicle that nonetheless "slaps."

"My scraper bike go hard, I don't need no car," intones Trunk Boi B-Janky in the chorus of a song that's so catchy it's "viral."[48] Hustlers and entrepreneurs, they bring a whole new meaning to the Bay Area slang term "out the trunk." "One of our promotional schemes is we ride around on scraper bikes eight deep, with speakers on the back slappin' our music," B-Janky informed me during a group interview at their West Oakland studio.

In the video for the song, one can see this carnivalesque market formation in action: the clip opens with a crew of hoodie-wearing, dreadlock-shaking young guys peddling through the Oakland streets on tricked-out bicycles. One of the "boiz," founding member Filthy Fam, rides on a double-axle three-wheel cruiser—essentially, a tricycle. On the back is a wooden cart painted in Oakland A's baseball colors with the words "That Go!"

The Trunk Boiz epitomize the jester-like juvenility, ironic impishness, and exuberant entrepreneurialism characteristic of the hyphy movement. Particularly salient here are the clever ways they expand the already multivocal signifier of the "trunk" in Bay Area hip-hop as a symbol of both do-it-yourself entrepreneurialism (i.e. "out the trunk" guerilla marketing) and low-frequency "booty bass"—the kind of bottom-heavy bombast associated with car rear ends and human backsides. Piling on additional meanings, the Trunk Boiz insist the "trunk" in their name is not a simple signifier but an acronym, a cipher for "Trunk Rattling Unique Nonstop Knock" (i.e. T.R.U.N.K.).[49] Hyphy artists frequently choose acronymic stage names, as if to pack verbal density into every word to the point of excess and near-absurdity. Another acronym appears prominently on their MySpace page[50]: G.N.D.T., the name of their self-formed music label. Curious, I inquired after its meaning. "Gorillas 'n da trunk," B-Janky straightforwardly replied. When I asked him to elaborate, his explanation was emphatic and entirely literal: "Our music sounds like wild animals knocking in yo' trunk!"

[48] The Trunk Boiz garnered global notoriety when their homemade video for the song "Scraper Bike" became one of the twenty most-watched YouTube clips of 2007. The video can be viewed at this URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQGLNPJ9VCE&feature=channel.

Despite the seeming guilelessness of B-Janky's answer, he and his homies are perfectly and even painfully aware of the racial implications suggested in such imagery—the long, vicious, and ongoing history of racial stereotyping in the Americas, where Africans and other non-white groups are represented in simian, animalistic terms (Hartigan 2005:47; Curtis 1971). So there is obviously an element of the ironic at work in the Trunk Boiz's naming practices, in their positive invocation of "gorilla" as a signifier of fierceness and sonic intensity. Through carnivalesque tactics of inversion, excess, irreverence, and parody—devices that could appropriately be attributed to that mischievous "master" trope in Afro-Diasporic folklore and literature, the Signifying Monkey (Gates 1988:52)—the Trunk Boiz exploit the social discomfort surrounding racially charged words like "gorilla" in order to get a charge out of people—to get attention, to provoke, and to rattle some cages, much like their bass-heavy beats do. Cultural historian Kennell Jackson remarks on the long history of this play between racial stereotype and absurdist parody, pointing to the Harlem Renaissance:

> Black cultural material coming from niche cultures, such as that of early jazz musicians or early rhythm and blues, was desired and reviled by many, regardless of racial territory, because it was seen as coming from the lower depths of black experience—occasionally, even from a primitivity. In fact, black musicians often playfully engaged this notion, "junglefying" their club, early film, and recording appearances. (2005:20)

Invoking the term "gorilla" also proves useful in the process of 'hoodspace mythmaking or "ghettofabulation" because it invites comparisons of the 'hood to treacherous, jungle-like terrain, where powerful beings struggle over territory and

[49] As another example of acronymic naming practices, Mistah FAB claims his name actually stands for the materialist motto, "Money Is Something To Always Have…Faeva Afta Bread" (i.e. M.I.S.T.A.H. F.A.B.).

resources. [51] In 'hoodspace conceived thusly, the "code of the street" takes on a Darwinian aspect, with macks and hustlers as "alpha males." At the same time, such invocations play on the desirable indeterminacies suggested by the term's homonym, "guerilla," with its rebellious, quasi-militant connotations. "Guerilla" simultaneously connotes a "street soldier" conscripted to turf warfare or, more progressively, a political insurrectionary figure. The latter proves especially appealing among young Oakland denizens, who grew up in a region strongly identified with political radicalism and a city where being a thug and a revolutionary are not considered any more mutually exclusive than being a streetwise hustler and an eccentric free spirit—the mackedelic player who Mac Dre stands as the role model.

Cars

"You gonna do a donut, Amanda? C'mon, ghostride the whip!" Those were the humorous parting words that T-Mazz, a 25 year-old aspiring hyphy rapper, yelled to me as I made a U-turn and drove away from his home on a quiet cul-de-sac in Fairfield, California. T-Mazz was the first of several people I interviewed in the Bay Area working-class suburbs, outside the city confines of San Francisco and Oakland. Fairfield had become a hyphy hotbed, home to the rap trio The Federation, whose local hit, "Hyphy" (2003), helped popularize the movement. So too had the nearby suburb of Vallejo, a

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[50] http://www.myspace.com/datrunkboiz

[51] The Trunk Boiz are not the first in hardcore hip-hop to employ animalistic terms such as "gorilla" to riff on racial histories and urban anxieties, exaggerating them to the point of absurdity. For example, the "G" in New York rapper 50 Cent's "G-Unit" clothing-and-entertainment company officially stands for "gorilla," although he and his associates have also publicly ascribed the meaning of the "G" to "guerilla" or "gangster." Atlanta rapper Gorilla Zoe extends the metaphor further with album titles such as *Welcome to*

largely African-American blue-collar "edge city" (Garreau 1992; Soja 2000) that had spawned numerous music luminaries over the years, including Johnny Otis, Sly Stone, Con Funk Shun, E-40, Mac Mall, and the late Mac Dre, who locals credit with inspiring the "hyphy" regional hip-hop style with his clown-like persona, mackedelic rave-influenced fashion, flamboyant dancing, and drug-addled antics.

Much like Tupac Shakur, Mac Dre exists as martyr-like legend or fallen-angel figure in the local hip-hop pantheon. Following his 2004 murder, "R.I.P. Mac Dre" t-shirts became regional fashion staples; they remain top-sellers at suburban shopping malls and urban flea markets alike. Several graffiti-art murals around the Bay immortalize the slain artist, including two impressive large-scale works in the unlikeliest of places: in San Francisco's artsy South of Market warehouse district and another in the East Oakland Latino neighborhood of Fruitvale. During his life, Mac Dre achieved widespread regional popularity with a series of hard-hitting but humorous CDs and DVDs released on his independent Thizz Entertainment music label (then known as Romp Records). Only in death, however, did he become a legend. His loss, and the hometown-pride-laced hero worship associated with it, inspired an outpouring of affect, activity, and expression that in large part propelled the hyphy movement. Like a second-line parade or a Day of the Dead festival, hyphy is form of celebratory mourning, trauma transformed into tragicomic pageantry.

In the carnival atmosphere of hyphy, scrapers lead the parade. Their mobile presence animates edge cities such as Vallejo and Fairfield and enlivens urban ghettos

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the Zoo (Bad Boy South 2007) and *Don't Feed Da Animals* (Bad Boy South 2009), comparing 'hoods to "zoos" or wild, chaotic spaces containing dangerous creatures.

like East Oakland and Hunter's Point. Scraper aesthetics are tied to an equally carnivalesque practice known, quite fittingly, as "sideshows": impromptu late-night gatherings where individuals show off their custom cars and perform dangerous stunts, including 180-degree spins or "donuts," figure eights, "sidewayz" lateral skids and corner turns, and "ghostriding the whip," where drivers get out from behind the wheel and walk alongside their slow-moving vehicles, doors open wide; passengers often jump on top. Sideshows sometimes occur on city streets but usually take place in empty parking lots, the originary site being the "Eastmont Mall" in Deep East Oakland—which is actually a shuttered shopping center that stands as a stark reminder to the deep level of disinvestment in the neighborhood.

Sideshows present a kind of reclaiming of those commercially abandoned spaces. Recalling early sideshow parties in the 1980s and 1990s, Too $hort emphasizes the ways in which stylized forms of consumption were on display:

> The older cats will tell you that the sideshow originated as a sort of a fashion show. You come out, you show your car. You show who can get the girls. You stand around. Everybody see what you're wearing. You kinda flash a little bit with your cars. It's got some high-performance parts under the engine. You just spin it a little bit, and do some stuff. (personal communication)

Too $hort attributes the dangers associated with sideshows to aggressive policing and oppressive policies directed at a population of young people with nowhere to go, with little access to private residences, teen centers, entertainment venues, or authorized public gathering spots:

> I think that sideshows became [a problem] when the police said, "No, you can't do this." It's like, we gotta do something. I remember seeing hundreds of teens hanging in Jack London Square [in Oakland], not able to get in the clubs or the restaurants. But then they were told "don't come downtown and just hang out." So what do you get out of that? You got a group of people that have no club, no party to go to, [so

> they] party in the street. You can't hang out downtown where it's active and lit up and the activities are going on. You gotta make your own party. So the party became any given street corner. (personal communication)

As evidence of Too $hort's assertions, most music-hall and club proprietors in Oakland as well as San Francisco refuse to provide performance space for hyphy rappers and dancers, whose activities they frame in terms of social chaos, illicit activity, threat, danger, and disorder (Caples 2008; Swan 2006). So do public officials, who in 2005 cancelled Oakland's premiere outdoor street festival, the carnival celebration known as Carijama, due to complaints in previous years about fights and vandalism by "unruly" mostly black and Latino young adults (Allen-Taylor 2005a). That summer, the Oakland City Council also clamped down on sideshows by passing an ordinance outlawing mere spectatorship at such events. (For bystanders, the first two citations would be counted as infractions but a third offense would be punishable as a criminal act) (Allen-Taylor 2005b).

Much like the origins of hip-hop itself in the deindustrialized Bronx, where DJs hotwired sound systems into city lampposts and b-boys claimed sidewalks using discarded squares of vinyl flooring, the expressive practices associated with the hyphy movement involve ingenious reclamations of space by marginalized young adults. Such practices mirror French social theorist Michel De Certeau's description of everyday "ways of operating"—the often transgressive tactics used by social actors to navigate spheres inscribed by power and dominance, particularly within the fraught, heavily regulated terrain of cities. According to De Certeau, these tactics "constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriat[e] the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production…Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and

ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline" (1984:xv). In invoking this notion of "antidiscipline," De Certeau positions his theory as a corollary or compliment to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979), approaching the subject from the perspective of disciplined, not disciplining, agents. Whether literally or figuratively, social actors in De Certeau's theory make use of back alleys, alternative routes, and abandoned spaces in order to evade surveillance and defy the logic of private property.

De Certeau's emphasis on one's ability to move about and claim temporary space within the regulated terrain of the city is especially apt in discussions of marginalized young hip-hoppers, particularly black and Latino youth, who frequently find themselves limited as to where they can gather without drawing negative attention from law enforcement and everyday citizens alike, who typically equate even the more innocuous activities of car cruising and street-corner gathering with criminality. In some Bay Area neighborhoods, including San Francisco's Mission and Bayview districts, gang injunctions make it increasingly acceptable for police officers to question young people and profile them for potential arrest simply because they are gathered in groups of three or more. Known gang members are prohibited from such peer gatherings within a given urban radius; still, injunctions have the effect of making every black and Latino young male in the area suspect (Kuz 2007; Yollin 2007).

Although no such injunctions exist in Oakland, accusations of police harassment and brutality within the city are common; the Oakland Police Department has continually come under fire for corruption over the past several decades, grabbing national attention in 2000 during the "Riders" scandal, in which a group of officers were prosecuted for repeated and systematic evidence planting and beating suspects. The New Year's 2009

shooting of Oscar Grant by the BART Police, the law-enforcement body charged with cross-county jurisdiction over the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) District, only exacerbated already poor police-community relations in Oakland. One of my consultants, Baby Champ, a member of the hyphy rap group the Trunk Boiz, reported a particularly harrowing instance of being arrested simply for riding his bike. "I've been sent to Santa Rita [jail] for riding my bicycle. The cop actually grabbed me off of my bike, slammed me, and I'm screaming at the top of my lungs 'help, help, help,' cuz I'm not trying to get shot or beat up or anything like that." Champ recalls how "the police tried to put an end to me and the scraper bike movement by taking me to jail…[P]art of the movement is riding in the street. And it's the law that you must ride in the street but you gotta ride on a certain part of the street. But I was in the middle of the street. I was wrong for that [but it's] basically a traffic ticket, a traffic violation." According to Champ, because he was riding alone and therefore showed reluctance to abandon his bicycle to the police or to the streets, the officer "jumped out the car and then just wrestled me and said that I was resisting arrest. And I'm on my bike and I'm like, 'OK, how far am I going to get for resisting arrest on my bike?' You know, I'm not gon leave my bike!"

Champ's experience points to the charged nature of his and his peers' relationship to private property as well as public space. Neither can be taken for granted since access to either is highly tenuous; either could be taken away, seemingly, at any moment. Therefore, claiming space (in the form of parking-lot stunt shows or thunderous car audio) and customizing of private property (through highly stylized cars, bikes, stereo

systems, etc.) become central facets of hyphy youth culture, where leisure pursuits and labor practices converge.

Slang

Another method hyphy heads use to assert collective presence and claim space is through the generation of an extensive slang vocabulary. The Bay Area has long been known as a bastion of vernacular innovation from the realm of youth culture. In the early 2000s, Berkeley High School language-arts teacher Rick Ayers drew national attention to his classroom, where he and students had been developing a slang dictionary to document the linguistic generativity apparent in the region, which had already contributed numerous slang terms, including "it's all good" and "off the hook," to the national lexicon. The Berkeley High project sparked so much interest that it was published as a book and became a regional bestseller (Ayers 2004). Years previous, in 1996, the Oakland Unified School District passed a pedagogically progressive resolution mandating instructional approaches to the teaching of Standard English that recognize the legitimacy of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)—a resolution that incited a national maelstorm of protest, condemnation, and misunderstanding that came to be known as the "Ebonics" controversy.

Controversial or not, the linguistic generativity of Bay Area urban youth culture is indisputable. Too $hort describes it thusly: "Everybody always wanted to be coming out with something new or just a new word, or a new look or just something that's not exactly like the next person. From the day I moved here when I was fourteen years old, I just immediately noticed that this was a place that was, you know, on its own drumbeat."

Slang in the Bay Area works simultaneously as a means to assert unique regional identities while at the same time, in keeping with classic youth-subculture studies (Cohen 1987; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1991; Willis 1977), it functions as well as a mechanism of boundary maintenance, where localized lexical and syntactical knowledges serve to establish insider-outsider status and solidify group identities. Linguistic anthropologist H. Samy Alim locates slang usage at the center of hip-hop culture, as an expressive but esoteric form of communication that allows hip-hoppers "to speak loudly but privately, to tell America about herself in a language that leaves her puzzled" (Alim 2006:76). Sarah Thornton, in her ethnography of the underground U.K. club-music scene, frames slang similarly in terms of in-group cache, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" (1990:125) within class-based cultural hierarchies to account for the ways speech and other intangibles such as mannerisms, personal style, and arcane knowledges serve as currency, as naturalized markers of belonging and prestige:

> Subcultural capital can be *objectified* or *embodied*. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections…Just as cultural capital is personified in "good" manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being "in the know," using…current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles. Both cultural and subcultural capital put a premium on the "second nature" of their knowledges. (Thornton 1996:12)

In hip-hop's prestige-from-below subcultural configuration, Alim argues "Black Language is the culturally dominant language variety" (2006:101). He further contends hip-hop is "a discursive space where Black Language is the prestige variety, [and] where Black linguistic and communicative norms are the standard…This is the space where language is…the primary site of authentication" (102).

Indeed, much of the slang associated with the hyphy movement and Bay Area hardcore rap results from neologistic innovations of African Americans. In a number of cases, the etymological origin of certain words can be tracked definitively to specific black performers. For example, Oakland MC Keak the Sneak coined the phrase “yadadamean,” a purposely slurred portmanteau of the inquisitive phrase “Do you know what I mean?,” a discourse marker uttered commonly in Bay Area rap lyrics and in everyday ‘hoodspace parlance. Even more significantly, Keak is credited with inventing the word “hyphy” itself; he insists upon recognition for this in the chorus of his *Billboard*-charting release, “Super Hyphy”: “I don’t think they know that’s my word!” (2005).

Another fount of lexical generativity, Vallejo’s E-40 is arguably the most linguistically influential rapper of all time. To the regional rap scene in particular he contributed the lasting place-name, the “Yay Area.” “Yay,” in addition to being a jubilatory interjection, is also an abbreviation for “yayo,” an Anglicized spelling of the Latin-American slang word for cocaine, “*llello*.” “Yay Area” captures the simultaneously utopic and dystopic sense of place in the Bay Area, a region characterized by stark juxtapositions: between wealth and poverty, natural beauty and harsh urbanity, free-spiritedness and ruthlessness, mellow attitudes and hardcore mind-sets. Beyond the regional, a number of E-40’s slang innovations have entered the global hip-hop vocabulary, including the catchphrase “pop your collar,” a metaphor he developed during the 1990s mobb-music era suggesting prideful hauteur and pimp-like panache; it can substituted with a kinesic gesture in which the speaker pantomimes turning up the collar of an imaginary jacket or polo shirt (or possibly the fur-lined cape of a king, queen, or

1970s-style pimp). During the apex of the hyphy movement, E-40 coined the similarly braggadocious verb, “flamboastin’,” a condensation the words “flamboyant” and “boasting.” While boastful gestures are nothing new to the hip-hop idiom—some sociolinguists tie the preponderance of boasting in rap performances to the Afro-Diasporic tradition of “toasting,” which they argue is fundamental to hip-hop lyricism and vocal delivery (Alim 2006; Rickford & Rickford 2000; Smitherman 1986)—E-40’s positive invocation of “flamboyance” suggests the acceptability of more flashy, florid, and I would argue feminized personal displays in the hyphy subculture—of a kind of colorful “peacocking” behavior sometimes attributed to “macks” and pimps but not typically associated with conventional hypermasculine, heteronormative gangster-rap posturing.

Along a similarly non-normative vein, E-40 devised the nearly equivocal slang word “tycoonin’” during hyphy’s highpoint as well. A verbalization of the noun “tycoon,” “tycoonin’”—much like “flamboastin” and “pop yo colla” —denotes showy displays of power, particularly with regard to material wealth. However, the carnivalesque irony inherent in the invocation of the word “coonin’” seems undeniable. To “coon,” in the black vernacular, is a verb whose meaning derives from the blackface minstrel tradition; specifically, from the shiftless, dandified buffoon character of Zip Coon, popularized in song and on stage during the 19th century (Lott 1995; Bogle 2001). “Cooning” denotes degrading performances of black stereotypes for the pleasure of white spectators; when done by African Americans, it is an act of debasement. “Coonery” is the criticism often lodged against mainstream rappers—particularly those espousing the hypermaterialist and nihilistic values of the urban “thug” or “gangsta”—by morally

disapproving African Americans, be they conscious rappers, bourgeois professionals, or Civil-Rights-era intellectuals.[52] Thus by incorporating "coonin'" into his own lexicon, E-40 flouts such moralizing efforts, offering up comically absurdist, carnivalesque forms of rhetoric instead. I suggest he is "clowning on" coonery, much like the Trunk Boiz "clown on" degrading racist imagery evoking the simian.

In another iteration of the rhetorically carnivalesque, E-40 and Keak the Sneak are both credited for popularizing—and adding multiple variants to—the 'hoodspace-based language game referred to sometimes as "izzle-speak." In izzle-speak, speakers affix the nonsense syllables "izzle," "izz," "ibble," or "eezy" to nouns and verbs, typically as suffixes (although occasionally "izz" is deployed as an infix) (Miller 2004). Most famous among current uses are the phrases, "fo' sheezy my neezy" and "fo' shizzle my nizzle," interpreted identically as "for sure my nigga." Of indeterminate origins, it is a form of speech-play linked to the disparate spaces of the prison yard and playground—for the dissimilar purposes of institutional obfuscation and childhood amusement, respectively.[53]

These language games and rhetorical patterns form the basis of what the self-described "Crestside clown" Mac Dre termed the "thizzlamic" idiom. A linguistic innovator himself, Mac Dre coined the term "thizz"—a polysemic word referring either to the drug ecstasy or any sort of ludic, euphoric state—as well as the related phrase,

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[52] Among the usual cast of characters of African-American hip-hop "haters" are actor and activist Bill Cosby, the late civil rights leader C. Delores Tucker, conservative commentator John McWhorter, jazz critic Stanley Crouch, and jazz musician Wynton Marsalis. Hip-hop scholar Jeffrey Ogbar does an excellent job parsing these debates toward the end of Chapter 5 of his book Hip-Hop Revolution (2009). Robin Kelley (1997) and Tricia Rose (2008) also cover these debates extensively in their work.

[53] Credit for this popular form of speech play is often incorrectly attributed to Los Angeles gangster rapper Snoop Dogg, who himself readily admits he learned the practice from E-40. This is one of numerous slights that serves to invigorate local pride among Bay Area hip-hoppers, whose quest for regional recognition is

"thizz face." The "thizz face" is a signature somatic gesture in hyphy culture that involves contorting one's face into a grimace. Often mistaken as menacing but actually comical, the thizz face is meant to mimic a look of disgust, as when Mac Dre explains in the "Thizzle Dance" song lyric, "First, I do like this/Put a look on my face like I smelled some piss" (2005). A feigned look of disgust, the thizz face actually calls attention to the bodily "lower strata" in a humorous, carnivalesque, and celebratory way, as in Bakhtin's description of the "grotesque body" as

> not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. (1984:26)

He adds that the significance of this "carnival-grotesque form" is "to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (34), a function I would also attribute to hyphy culture, at least for the libratory moments in which it is enacted and performed.

The celebratory term "go dumb" is also attributed to Mac Dre, as are its synonyms, "get stupid" and "go dummy retarded." Mac Dre protégé Mistah FAB mines this consummately hyphy trope of mental retardation and physical impairment for further comic effect in his imploration throughout his oeuvre to "ride the yellow bus"—a

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spurred in large part by the fact that their homegrown scene seldom receives recognition for all that it has

metonym for engaging in purposely foolish, crazy, childish, even moronic behavior of the kind deemed libratory in the hyphy worldview. On the cover of his album, *Da Baydestrian* (2007), FAB appears standing on a suburban sidewalk, waiting for the "Special Education" school bus, flashing a pouty "thizz face." He holds a lunchbox and dons a bicycle helmet similar to the type worn by epileptic children. These are hardly the typical signifiers of the control-obsessed, coolly comported gangster rapper. Far more than is typical in hardcore hip-hop, hyphy artists use images of the abject—what Bakhtin deemed the "debased" forms of the carnival that he argues are highly generative within a culture (1984)—to open up the heavily policed, "hemmed-up" symbolic spaces of 'hood, where preoccupations with turf boundaries, status defenses, and harshly enforced codes rule the land.

It follows, given the aforementioned artists are all African American, that Alim's claim about black-vernacular and verbal-art forms dominating the "discursive space" of hip-hop holds true within the hyphy subculture as well. At the same time, I often heard non-black speakers—particularly young Latinos, Asians, and Pacific Islanders who grew up sharing 'hoodspace with African Americans—employ hyphy slang terminology and rhetorical patterning in linguistically "competent" ways. If, as Alim claims, language serves as a "primary site of authentication" (2006:102) in hip-hop culture, then these speakers were tacitly authenticated as members of the hyphy "speech community" (Hymes 1974) by their African-American peers. Thus, the hyphy speech community can reasonably be described as multiracial as can the movement as a whole. Hyphy represents

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contributed to hip-hop culture as a whole.

what cultural historian Kennell Jackson characterizes to as a site of black "cultural traffic":

> [C]ultural traffic can take many forms, but it always presupposes the movement of cultural matter. Even more importantly, cultural traffic involves some system of exchange or commerce. Between black performances and the viewers looking in on those performances, there occurs trade in ideas, styles, impressions, body language, and gestures. (2005:8)

Jackson in fact emphasizes the movement of language, observing that "[o]ne of the biggest areas of recent black cultural export has been in the field of linguistic invention" (12). As evidence, he cites the voluminous slang neologisms chronicled in the *Berkeley High School Slang Dictionary* (2004)—many of which were invented Bay Area black youth (12). The widespread use of black lexical inventions by non-black speakers points to what Jackson opines is "a fascinating reality of recent black cultural traffic…[W]e are approaching a time when the relationship between black cultures and performance by blacks is becoming highly problematic" (9).

More so than it aids in enclosures—in maintaining boundaries between different racial and generational groups—hyphy slang works as a highly productive linguistic site where the profusion or florescence of language seems most salient; where there is a need to identify new meanings, markers, and descriptors of odd regional identities and acts that heretofore have eluded pat characterizations and cultural stereotypes.

Fashion

A mere glance at the mackedelic cover art for the Mac Dre album, *Thizzelle Washington* (2002), reveals much about the way in which the Bay Area hip-hop scene is, aesthetically and stylistically, "on its own drumbeat," as Too $hort claims. The whimsical

image features the artist sporting a large Afro, a striped polo shirt, oversized aviator sunglasses, and a platinum chain from which hangs a pendant spelling the word “thizz.” His face is screwed into a “thizz face” scowl. His body is comported into a sideways-cocked, arms-akimbo posture—cocky but also comical—as if caught in mid-performance of his trademark “thizzle dance” (which closely resembles the “Harlem shake” or Morris Day and the Time’s “the bird.”) This picture is superimposed in front of psychedelic color-swirled background that makes Mac Dre’s body look luminescent. His Afro appears as a glowing halo.

While polo shirts and gaudy pendants have long been staples of hip-hop fashion, the tripped-out treatment of this image is pure Bay Area, and links Mac Dre’s visage with countercultural predecessors tracking back to the pimp-wise psychedelia of Sly Stone. Mac Dre’s vivid and playful visual stylings set the tone for what would, shortly after his 2004 death, be referred to as the hyphy movement. Hyphy style is, like Mac Dre, colorful and eclectic, drawing heavily from a wide array of subcultural influences. Interestingly, many of these influences derive from subcultural movements associated historically with white American and British youth: hippies, punk rockers, skaters, and ravers. In this way, hyphy fashion exceeds understandings of hardcore hip-hop aesthetics in terms of purely black visual codes. It falls much more clearly into a permeable cultural arena that cultural historian Kennell Jackson characterizes in terms of “black cultural traffic,” where “trade in ideas, styles, impressions, body language, and gestures” occurs in all directions, with African Americans acting as appropriators as well as originators (2005:8):

> Much has been made…of blacks and black communities as net exporters of cultural material to others. But there is an important corollary to this premise: blacks have been remarkable importers of cultural elements from other groups and cultural

> traditions. Though black cultural products appear highly local and group-specific in origin, they have relied on a vigorous cosmopolitanism in their formation. (17)

For young men, the foundation of hyphy's eclectically recombinant style is built upon a basic foundation: giant "coke white" t-shirts, baggy jeans, and tight dreadlocks suitable for shaking dramatically while performing hyphy dance moves; "shake dem dreads" is a common hyphy refrain, to which participants respond with animated upper-body movements resembling the chaotic kinetic rituals of the rock formation (Grossberg 1992:131): "headbanging" in heavy metal and "slam dancing" in punk rock. The dreadlock trend in the Bay Area likely derives from the hairstyle's popularity among young Southern blacks, but can simultaneously be read as homage to Rastafarian Afrocentrism in a region that once served as primary locus of the Black Power Movement and currently lies at the forefront of the marijuana legalization movement (Diaz 2009). The jeans must be from a designer street-wear label, preferably from French fashion company Girbaud, and the shirt must be pristinely clean—essentially, brand new. To meet the high-demand for immaculate white tees, nearly every corner store in the 'hoods of the Bay Area stocks XXXL Hanes basic men's undershirts alongside junk food, liquor, and other disposable goods. Upon this basic uniform, boys layer a number of stylistic embellishments. Chief among them are hoodies, baseball caps, and sneakers with multihued colorways of the kind popularized by the Japanese street-apparel company A Bathing Ape (a.k.a. "BAPE"), famous for neon-camouflage patterns and graphic designs that incorporate comic-book, cartoon, and pop-culture characters. In the 'hood, "ghettofabulous" (Jackson 2005:40) BAPE knockoffs suffice, since authentic garments

are purposely released in limited production, which drives exorbitant pricing—well out of reach of the typical kid from the 'hood, even one who hustles.

BAPE is one of several brands popular among hyphy kids that first gained cache among mostly Caucasian and Asian hipsters and skaters in New York City and Tokyo. Not coincidentally, as the hyphy movement gained momentum in the early 2000s, skateboarding also began to emerge as a huge trend among African-American teenagers in Oakland, so it is unsurprising skater fashion would find influence. Chief among local trendsetters of black-skater chic is the Berkeley-based "blipster" (e.g. "black hipster") rap group the Wolf Pack, one of whose members (who goes by the stage name "Young L") is a former competitive skater. Discovered by Too $hort and signed onto his Up All Nite record label, "the Pack" achieved national hit status with their track "Vans," a paean to (and astounding act of unpaid product placement for) the Vans line of footwear popular among skaters and surfers since the 1970s. In the song, the Pack lovingly refers to their Vans as "punk rock" shoes, as if to distinguish their style from the fashion clichés of hip-hop culture and align the brand more clearly with the "rock formation" (Grossberg 1992:131). The video for the song features Too $hort throwing away a pair Nike Air Force Ones—a style of basketball sneaker closely associated with hip-hop culture and urban black males.

While white tees serve as a blank canvas for hyphy fashion, often shirts appear customized by airbrush and silkscreen artists, who sell their wares at local swap meets. Diamond and dollar-sign motifs prove popular, as do local-pride catchphrases ("Yay Area," "tha Town," etc.), portraits of Mac Dre, and BAPE-inspired renderings of cartoon characters depicted wearing ghettofabulous elements such as "dookie rope" chains, "doo-

rag" scarves, and gold-teeth "fronts" or "grills." "Marvin the Martian" and "Spongebob Squarepants" are among the favorites, as is "Chucky" from the *Child's Play* horror film franchise. More horrific is the profusion of homemade "R.I.P." t-shirts printed on black cotton that memorialize slain loved ones. A cottage industry all its own, R.I.P. t-shirts typically include iron-on photos of the deceased and airbrushed eulogies containing messages like "Thizz in peace lil' homey" and "Gone, but not forgotten." These grim articles are often layered with more colorful clothing items of the kind described above—another instantiation of the hyphy penchant for stark, cacophonous juxtaposition: between deadly serious and the playfully infantile affects, between the tragic and the comic, the menacing and the madcap.

Cartoonish juvenilia permeate the hyphy aesthetic for girls as well, particularly among young African-American women growing up in the 'hood, who favor high-contrast colors, horizontal-striped socks and leggings, and fluorescent-hued accessories reminiscent of the 1980s. Even hair weaves read as hyphy: the signature braided extensions for hyphy girls contain strands of Day-Glo pink or electric-blue highlights. Oakland fashion maven Mario B., a former gay hustler turned modeling instructor at Youth UpRising, calls this style alternately the "Rainbow Brite" and the "Cyndi Lauper" look: the former references an animated character popular in the 1980s, magically endowed with the power to bring color to a colorless world; the later refers to the 1980s pop star known for wearing outrageous pseudo-punk clothing, gaudy layers of jewelry, and radically dyed hair. As "Millennial Generation" teenagers, most hyphy girls have no personal memory of such pop-cultural ephemera, so the predilection for 1980s style is peculiar. According to Mario B., "if you ask them, they have no idea where this style

comes from. They're just following what's in now." These style choices seem motivated more in terms of their seeming novelty than in the desire to give a consciously postmodern "wink" or nostalgic reference.

Another perplexing element of hyphy female fashion, school-age girls often carry glossy plastic backpacks, manufactured for small children, featuring animated characters such as Dora the Explorer and Disney's Tinkerbell. (Teenage boys sometimes sport Spiderman or Superman versions of the same.) These are hardly items one would expect to register as "cool" among teenagers, who are typically focused on distancing themselves from childhood, not clinging to it. But, again, the emphasis in hyphy aesthetics on forms of infantilism, with a sense of not wanting to grow up, takes on particular valence among a population of young people living in harsh, oftentimes developmentally deleterious environments who, in most cases, are forced to grow up too fast.

In addition to a mutual fixation on cartoonish imagery, hyphy young men and women both share an affinity for exaggerated eyewear styles. "Referred to as "stunna shades," these large-rimmed sunglasses come in numerous shapes and colors, and are meant to imbue wearers with rock-star eminence capable of "stunning" onlookers. Aviators, Elvis Presley rockers, and bright-colored Ray-Bans do the trick, but even more popular are oversized oval-shaped glasses of the kind popularized in the 1960s and 1970s by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and first-wave feminist Gloria Steinem (and reintroduced in the new millennium by influential celebrity stylist Rachael Zoe). While it would be an overstatement to frame this gesture as a conscious invocation of feminism, it is interesting to note the ways in which preferences for this particular fashion accessory

challenges gender-normative roles, since the glasses are designed for women but are regularly worn by young men as well.

The "stunna shade" trend can be credited, yet again, to Mac Dre, who frequently appeared wearing oversized sunglasses as part of his signature style but also, ostensibly, to conceal the tell-tale signs of habitual psychedelic drug use: the red eyes of a chronic dope smoker and the dilated pupils of an avid ecstasy pill popper. Mac Dre actually borrowed the alien-eye sunglass style from the giddy, ecstasy-fueled aesthetics of the rave subculture, which emerged from the U.K. dance-music underground in late-1980s but was extremely active in the electronica Mecca of the Bay Area during the 1990s.

Hyphy concerts sometimes resemble raves, as I came to find out in 2007, while attending an all-ages "Super Hyphy" show at the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds—one in a twenty-odd series of all-ages concerts that, between 2005 and 2008, showcased all the local hardcore-rap luminaries, including E-40, Too $hort, and Keak the Sneak. The concerts took place entirely in the suburban and periurban North Bay county of Sonoma—in the towns of Santa Rosa and Petaluma, specifically—given that bigger cities like San Francisco and Oakland had placed a de facto ban on large-scale hardcore-rap shows, citing as justification the tendency for violent altercations at the end of such shows. Despite the heavy security detail at the entrance, marijuana joints and liquor flasks circulated bountifully. The event attracted throngs of multiracial teenagers from all over the Bay Area, who came donning their thizzed-out best. In addition to the requisite striped stockings and white tees, I noticed a number of idiosyncratic elements that affirmed a carnivalesque sense of things. One Latino male teenager wore glow-in-the-dark novelty glasses formed out of luminescent plastic tubing of the kind used for

“glowsticks” at raves and amusement parks. Another young African-American man sported a shiny neon-green clown-costume wig. Whenever any rapper implored the crowd to “shake them dreads,” he obliged enthusiastically, performing the spastic, head-banging, arm-flailing moves associated with “getting hyphy”; as his metallic tresses streaked across the smoke-filled air, they appeared to leave hallucinatory “tracers.” Several boys and girls wore purple, green, and gold Mardi Gras beads; those seemed the de facto colors for hyphy team “players,” given the subculture’s corresponding color-coded fixations on 1) on getting high, preferably by smoking potent Northern California “purp” or “grapes” (i.e. marijuana buds); 2) hustling and making money or “green”; and 3) bringing gold-hued “shine” to the region and to self by attaining success, acknowledgement, and respect.

Given the oftentimes burred experiential distinctions between having fun and handling business within hyphy, this event belonged quite clearly to the former category for concert attendees. But for the concert’s promoters, a white and African-American pair of North Bay radio disc jockeys (DJ Amen and D-Sharpe) who were there to handle business, their entrepreneurial efforts were hampered when the night ended with a scuffle and subsequent police shutdown. The brawl broke out several yards in front of me, during headliner Keak the Sneak’s set. It appeared only to be a fistfight, given that metal-detector wand-wielding security guards had screened attendees for weapons at the auditorium entrance. From what I witnessed, the altercation hardly justified the police’s show of force, as they rushed into the fairgrounds-pavilion venue armed with large rifles. My companion assured me they were probably loaded with rubber bullets—the same weapons used by riot police. It was nonetheless intimidating.

By 2008, fisticuffs had escalated into two instances of gunplay at subsequent Super Hyphy shows, prompting the owners of a key North Bay venue, the Phoenix Theater in Petaluma, to ban all concerts associated with the hyphy movement, effectively killing the Super Hyphy series (Payne 2008). The ongoing contraction of performance venues offers further evidence of the ways in which hyphy is as much about social space as expressive culture, and is propelled by the frustrated sense among marginalized young people that they lack legitimate places to go and productive things to do. Though initially energized by those spatial politics, ultimately they worked to stymie the movement which, by 2008, when all but a few clubs and concert halls were willing to book hyphy artists, was declared "dead" by the local media (Arnold 2008a). Still, the rituals associated with it push on and keep moving—they "go."

Dance

Beyond music venues, an important alternative outlet for hyphy performativity emerged to highlight the regionally unique competitive dance style known as "turfing." As the name suggests, turf dancing is as much about spatial politics as it is about bodily expression. "Turf" is actually an acronym for "Taking Up Room on the Floor," a name given to the form by the veteran hip-hop dancer Jeriel Bey, a popular dance instructor at afterschool youth programs in Oakland. By translating the territorially fraught, turf-oriented dynamics inherent in the code of the streets into the language of dance, Bey and others like him seek to provide a less dangerous sphere for young people to claim space and win respect.

Turfing is so popular that, on any given day in Oakland, one can see young adults practicing improvisational moves. They might be standing at a bus stop, hanging with friends on street corners, or waiting in line at a hamburger stand. But the form truly takes flight in more formal performance contexts, at organized dance contests referred to "battles." In these more official settings, competitors demonstrate mastery of difficult movements and choreographic originality while simultaneously taunting, clowning on, and challenging opponents. This often involves confrontational gestures: gesticulating into a competitor's face, grabbing his or her hat—I even witnessed one mischievous dancer pantomime as if he were a dog urinating on his rival. Although exchanges appear aggressive, turf-dance battles actually function through a well-understood set of rules and honed etiquette regarding fairness in turn-taking and time-allotment on the dance floor. An emcee is always present to help regulate the proceedings while simultaneously fulfilling "hype man" duties.

Far more codified and composed than the purposely comical "thizzle dance," or the personally idiosyncratic act of "going dumb," turf dancing incorporates acrobatic limb contortions and double-jointed illusions best performed by the young and nimble. (Battles often include children as contestants.) Mostly improvisational, turfing involves no predetermined step sequences but does entail a mélange of moves drawn from various forms of urban dance, from "breaking" to "krumping" to "voguing." Particularly influential are the "funk styles" of dance, better known as "popping" and "locking," which originated in California during the 1970s; although in the 1980s popping and locking were incorrectly collapsed into the blanket marketing term "breakdancing," they actually predate rap and hip-hop culture and, hence, were originally danced to funk

music.[54] Turf dancers place particular emphasis on two locally historic forms of "funk" dance which they work to revitalize: "Oakland boogaloo"[55] and the San Francisco "Fillmore strut,"[56] both of which trace their roots back to the "steppers" and cane-wielding "stick" team dancers of 1960s Oakland, who performed everywhere from homegrown talent shows to Black Panther rallies, and drew inspiration from group choreography of popular R&B acts such as The Temptations and Four Tops. (Crykit Kolnik, personal communication, August 18, 2007).

Spanning these different historical forms of funk dance are a series of movements, alternately robotic and fluid, that contemporary turf dancers reanimate into new routines. These moves include: *glides*, made famous by Michael Jackson with his "moonwalk" backslide; *miming*, which Bay Area funk dancers incorporated in the 1970s while working as street performers at Fisherman's Wharf (where they danced for tourists alongside popular mime acts, including comedian Robin Williams)[57]; *roboting*, in which dancers pantomime the rigid movements of robot (including malfunctions and breakdowns)—a style first popularized by poppers and lockers on the hit television series *Soul Train* during the 1970s; *tutting*, whose angular arm movements, recalling Egyptian

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[54] Funk styles developed concomitantly to the "b-boying" or "breaking" craze in 1970s New York. Funk dance styles like popping and locking actually predate rap music, so they typically were performed with funk or electrofunk music accompaniment. Locking, named after the locking of joints at the end of movements, emerged out of South Central Los Angeles (Cross 2003), while popping, a slightly more fluid form of movement that nonetheless also involves jerky or halted contractions of muscles (known as "pops" or "hits") is attributed alternately to a Fresno-based dance crew known as the Electronic Boogaloo Lockers (http://www.electricboogaloos.com/knowledge.html) and an Oakland "robot" dancer named Sen Robot (Cross 2003). East Coast b-boys appropriated funk dance moves into their routines during the 1980s, when they were featured in mainstream films such as *Wild Style* (1982), *Beat Street* (1984), *Breakin'* (1984), and *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* (1984).

[55] Among the most famous Oakland boogaloo crews were the Black Resurgents and the Black Messengers.

[56] The still-active Medea Sirkus remains the most renown of the San Francisco Fillmore strut crews.

[57] Strut veteran Harry Berry on credits Robin Williams' 1970s mime work as influential in his dancing in this taped interview, accessible on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myD4MWmewuI

hieroglyphs, served as forerunner to the "voguing" style associated with the New York underground gay club scene in 1980s (later popularized by Madonna); and *waving*, wherein sections of the performer's body undulates in smooth, wave-like motions—later referred to as "liquid dancing" when appropriated by members of the rave subculture. All these traveling influences offer further testament to hyphy's recombinant nature, as postmodern product of the circulatory, highly mediated flows of culture.

I personally witnessed these terse interchanges and liquid flows at several turf battles during 2007. The first one took place one stormy winter day at San Francisco City College—a trek that required me to cross the Bay Bridge during high-wind gusts that blew my own car slightly "sidewayz," as if "ghostriding" of its own volition. When I safely made it off the highway, I found myself in San Francisco's southern hinterlands, where racial diversity still reigns despite overall demographic shifts in the city toward whiteness and affluence. City College sits at the intersection of the largely lower-middle-class Asian neighborhood of Ingleside and the low-income African-American Lakeview area, both of which border the working-class immigrant enclave (Latino and otherwise) of the Outer Mission/Excelsior and, just south of city limits, the suburb of Daly City, home to the highest concentration of Filipinos/Filipino Americans of any mid-size city in North America (Vergara 2008). Unfamiliar with the City College campus, I searched for the gymnasium where the battle was set to take place, and knew I was nearing my destination when I spotted several parked police cars. Despite the low-profile grassroots nature of the event, anything associated with hyphy inevitably draws a police presence.

Inside the slightly dilapidated gymnasium, I encountered a smallish crowd that reflected the environs: mostly African Americans—young adults but also children and older family members in support—as well as a significant contingent of Latino and Asian youth and a few white kids sprinkled in. The event's emcee was a young black woman in her early twenties, likely and a member of the college student group that organized the battle, who sported a punky "faux hawk" hairdo and a matching sneaker-and-sweatshirt ensemble in Rastafarian green, yellow, and red. She kept participants in check and upheld a wholesome, spirited tone that made the police presence seem entirely unwarranted. The event opened with a middle-aged black minister who delivered a brief sermon testifying to the evils of drugs, gangs, and violence. Clad in a leather Harley-Davidson motorcycle vest, he described himself as a former crack-dealing "thug" who found redemption through Christ. Although he elicited a few "amens" from older attendees, most young people appeared distracted and anxious to get to the dancing. First on the program, a troupe of small children, some of whom couldn't have been much older than three, who performed a junior hyphy dance to a sing-songy rap track about the alphabet and the importance of eating vegetables—a nursery rhyme ostensibly composed by the dreadlocked young man who enthusiastically coached them along.

The main event pitted two reputed turf-dance crews against each other: the Animaniakz and the Gobots. As individuals and pairs from each team took terms, the faux-hawked Mistress of Ceremonies asked the audience to respond with applause; winners would ultimately be determined by the intensity of cumulative clapping. The dancers who earned the loudest response were the physical illusionists whose arm sockets and elbows appeared double-jointed as they coiled elastically in and out of logic-defying,

yogic positions. Fancy footwork also prevailed, and an undeniable star emerged: "Joe Dat Go." An unassuming young Asian man, Joe sat quietly for much of the competition a few feet away from me in the bleachers, looking slightly awkward in the cool-kid crowd of mostly African-American hip-hoppers, with his side-cocked baseball cap and baggy jeans. To my surprise, about midway through the competition Joe was called upon to "go," literally cheered onto the floor, where he proceeded to perform a series of glides not just in straight lines *a la* the "moonwalk" but unidirectionally across the gym, even up into the seats. His nimble moves made three-dimensional space appear to be one smooth plane he could glide across, like an ice skater, or a hovercraft. The adroitness with which Joe moves across typically bumpy or fraught racialized spaces reveals the highly ambiguous "racial kinesics" (Jackson 2005:16) of hyphy, a cultural sphere marked primarily as a space of blackness but which pivots on an understanding of race as performative and permeable, open to the possibilities of non-African Americans engaging competently in key rituals. Kennell Jackson historicizes this thusly:

> The assumed organic relationship between black cultures and black performers or performances has always been open to question. But today, this relationship shows new ruptures. Our current condition is not one to disparage but to treat as an interesting state of affairs…where new, even magical, things can happen. (2005:9)

I witnessed Joe Dat Go work his transracial "magic" again later that year over in Deep East Oakland, at a dance battled hosted by Youth UpRising (YU). One of few local teen centers that offer turf dance lessons, YU had became a hub of turfing from 2004 to 2005, during the hyphy heyday. It even served as a key filming location when Black Entertainment Television (BET) came to the Bay Area to shoot a documentary about the hyphy movement (*The Hype on Hyphy* 2006). Dance battles were on indefinite hiatus,

however, when I began my association with YU in 2006. Staffers claimed crowd control had become too difficult at the incredibly popular events, which regularly attracted between 300 and 400 attendees. This pushed the venue beyond capacity and frustrated those who had to be turned away. Although the performances themselves always went off without incident, problems arose when overflow and parking-lot crowds became unruly—hyphy, one could say—engaging occasionally in fistfights and sideshow activity.

When YU decided to resurrect turf-dance battles in June of 2007, the hype surrounding hyphy had subdued a bit, resulting in a more manageable crowd of about 200 young people. Included among the performers were members of YU's in-house dance team, the Turf Fienz, as well as friendly rivals from the Architeckz crew, the group founded by Jeriel Bey whose dancers had recently been featured in the music video for the E-40 hit song, "Tell Me When to Go" (Warner Bros. 2006). One of the Architeckz, a diminutive, gamine young African-American woman named Lil Scrapi, reigned queen of the scene that day, pulling double duties as event co-organizer and performer. Dressed stylishly in high-top sneakers, skinny jeans, and shiny chain-link suspenders, Scrapi led a group of female turfers—tomboys and girly-girls alike—in a series of acrobatic routines that rivaled the boys'. This included a move few men would attempt: split drops, in which the dancer thrusts torso to ground, legs splayed, and then scissors back up to standing, sometimes after bouncing a few times. These and other provocative steps, including gestures resembling the "booty pop" associated with strippers, pushed the line of appropriateness for YU staffers, who could be seen rolling their eyes and smiling nervously as the girls got hyphy. Ultimately, though, there was an understanding among

the almost entirely non-white staff about the cultural context of such moves—of the fact that, in Afro-Diasporic dance traditions (turfing included), much emphasis is placed upon forms of movement rooted in pelvic and lower regions of the body, and need not be viewed inherently suggestive or sexual.

Turfing pushes the bounds of the permissible and acceptable with regards to masculine performativity as well, particularly in the context of hardcore hip-hop's rigidly masculine "racial kinesics" (Jackson 2005:16). Male turfers often incorporate flamboyant gestures—swishing limbs, jaunty hair flips, elegant pirouettes, and affected "vogue"-like poses—that invite non-heteronormative interpretations. Such an interpretation was confirmed during a conversation I had with Casual, a rapper with the famed Oakland hip-hop crew Hieroglyphics, who spent time as a youth mentor at Youth UpRising, observing there

> Some of these moves guys are doing now, they're letting themselves go completely. Some of the movements are kind of feminine. It's just a style, and it don't mean nothing about their sexual preference. But now gangster-type fools' brains are opening up a little bit more. Like, "Oh, he ain't a fag, he hyphy! He's just feeling himself!" [laughs]. I don't think I could ever let loose enough to show a feminine side. I grew up in a different era. But these kids are doing it! That's one thing I like about the hyphy movement. At least you're learning more about yourself. You ain't ashamed to do some shit that I'm ashamed to do.

It would be an overstatement to suggest the momentary liberations and transgressions facilitated by turf dancing and the hyphy movement resolve the problem of homophobia and misogyny among practitioners. Even the commentary of Casual belies a highly heteronormative bias in his insistence that boys performing "feminine" moves in no way suggests latent homosexuality but, rather, a looser, more "learned" and less "ashamed" form of hetero-masculinity. A number of times while interviewing members

of the local hardcore hip-hop community, I encountered alarmingly anti-gay rhetoric. Further, if music lyrics were a methodological focus here, I could indeed devote pages of this analysis to the critique of sexist rap lyrics in hyphy rap. But such heteronormative, patriarchal, often homophobic tendencies in hardcore hip-hop are well documented (Davis 1995; Forman 1994; Haugen 2003; hooks 1994; Pough 2004; Rose 2008; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Wallace 1995). What seems most salient and surprising here are the ways in which turfing and other hyphy cultural forms offer important sites for the "opening up" of otherwise rigid racialized and gendered identities—for new performances of unpredictable "social scripts" (Jackson 2005:18) that rely less on clichéd tropes of hypermasculinity and black racial authenticity. They suggest that, even in heavily codified, rigidly racialized and gendered hardcore 'hoodspaces, "softer," more permeable, abundant, and fleshly embodied performances sometimes take center stage, and garner enthusiastic response.

Chapter Four

Backpacker Bohemia:
The Cultural Economy of "Conscious" Hip-hop

Within the hip-hop formation, the widely inclusive rubric of "backpacker"—which encompasses the secondary but equally important descriptor "conscious" rap—designates a semi-autonomous sphere of artistic principles and sensibilities, an alternative camp or school of thought loosely defined in opposition to hardcore- or street-rap ideologies. For the most part, backpack hip-hoppers and conscious MCs abide by an anti-establishment cultural logic akin to the punk/indie/alternative strain of the "rock formation" (Grossberg 1992:131), and similarly use the word "underground" to describe a value system calibrated in terms of stylistic distance from corporate-produced pop. More specifically, backpacker heads eschew the overtly materialistic, aggressively egoistic preoccupations pervading contemporary chart-topping rap, professing instead to be motivated by love for the art form and for the hip-hop community.

As with the hardcore-rap camp and its privileging of street knowledge, a sense of belonging within this particular set requires access to a series of authenticating knowledges, without which one would be judged a novice, neophyte, or, at worst, a poseur. For backpackers, this requires comprehension of hip-hop's pre-corporate cultural roots and the history of its resilient "old school" artistic traditions (MCing, DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti art) that so-called "true skool" practitioners charge themselves with keeping alive. Importantly, such literacies can be attained through sincere effort and dedication, rather than native understanding or experience, as is the case for hardcore-rap

artists and the 'hood-based communities they profess to represent: people who for the most part grow up immersed in a set of social realities governed by the "code of the streets."

Arguably, there is no such thing as a "native" backpack hip-hopper. Backpacker in fact denotes a deterritorialized "imagined community" of devotees spanning boundaries between race and ethnicity, suburb and city, even state and nation. Sophisticated "global cities" such as San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Tokyo, Amsterdam, Paris, and London provide ideal setting for backpacker activity; these are the likeliest loci of true-skool cool, where one might find vintage record stores, edgy nightclubs, aerosol-art exhibitions, and limited-issue sneaker boutiques. Although backpackers often espouse local pride, they do so with an air of cosmopolitanism that differs from the hyperlocal, somewhat provincial sense of place pervading hardcore rap, where the specificities of gritty cities, neighborhoods, and blocks become referents for the real, and for "keeping it real."

Other than being conversant with the aforementioned topics, few empirically verifiable badges of authenticity exist for backpackers. They "keep it real" primarily through enunciative efforts, by professing earnest concern for the predicament of the hip-hop arts in the age of mass culture. While the requirements for what counts as "real" hip-hop may be steep—artistic works need to demonstrate sufficiently anti-corporate underpinnings at the level of style, content, and means of production—the credentials required for becoming a "real" backpacker hip-hopp*er* are somewhat less rigid since they can be acquired; they do not hinge upon innate or uneasily attainable identity markers

such phenotypic blackness, ‘hood residence, underworld association, or the seamless performance of street swagger.

Accordingly, backpacker hip-hop heads require no “ghetto pass,” and can in fact find legitimate footing in this alternative sphere with little to no direct experience inhabiting ‘hoodspace. As a result, backpacker-camp adherents in the U.S. run the gamut of socioeconomic and ethnoracial backgrounds. In midsize cities and college towns, audiences at concerts skew heavily towards whites, whereas in larger, more diverse metropolitan areas, crowds apportion more evenly between African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and whites; such is the case in the Bay Area, a bastion of backpacker rap. If anything, the racial groups most represented in the global backpacker sphere are the very ones most conspicuously absent in hardcore rap: those of European and Asian ancestry. This is particularly true within the community of music composers involved in the backpacker occupation of “making beats,” the term ethnographer Joseph Schloss uses to designate the sonic arts of “turntablism” (including club DJs and “scratch” DJs) and sample-based music production (digitally synthesizing, mixing, and mastering found sounds) (Schloss 2004). In a quick survey of the Bay Area beat-making landscape, one in fact finds a preponderance of whites (DJ Shadow, Peanut Butter Wolf, J-Boogie, Spair and Platurn of the Oakland Faders, Romanowski, Zeph, DJ Neta) and Asian Americans (Q-Bert, Mix Master Mike, Shortkut, and Apollo of the Invisibl Skratch Piklz; Ren the Vinyl Archaeologist; Dan “The Automator” Nakamura; Similak Chyld; DJ Zita).

In terms of class location, backpacker music attracts a more privileged set of hip-hop aficionados than street-oriented rap.[58] Popular backpacker hip-hop clubs in San Francisco such as Poleng Lounge, Six, Mighty, and Mezzanine cater primarily to hip, 21-and-over upwardly mobile young professionals, often charging hefty admission covers, while East Bay nonprofit cultural centers such as La Peña and Eastside Arts, which regularly feature conscious rap, attract largely college-bound, college-going, or college-educated heads through neo-bohemian programming (poetry slams, consciousness-raising events, international music gatherings, etc.). Nevertheless, members of the working, middle, and upper-middle classes mix more freely at backpacker events than at hardcore rap gatherings given the former scene's less rigidly pronounced racial and class markers.

The requirements for becoming a backpacker "head" include, first and foremost, a professed dedication to hip-hop culture. As evidence of this dedication, one must acquire knowledge of hip-hop's roots, and be able to recite an orthodox historical narrative that starts with hip-hop's origin in the 1970s South Bronx, extends through rap music's Afrocentric "golden era" in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and concludes with its decline into gangster nihilism and corporate co-optation from the mid-1990s onward. Such literacies separate true "heads" from mere poseurs or dilettantes. Adisa Banjoko, a noted local writer and international lecturer on hip-hop, makes the following analogy: "Because I wear that baseball hat, it doesn't make me a real fan of baseball. It's the same situation

[58] This is not to say well-heeled whites do not listen to hardcore rap. Whites in the U.S. are, in fact, the largest consumers of rap music, which undoubtedly includes the street-oriented strains of "gangsta" and "thug" rap that have dominated the mainstream since the mid 1990s. Within hardcore rap's sizeable white fan base, however, middle- and upper-middle-class fans form something of a clandestine listening public, given the implicit social sanction against their displaying such proclivities, which are typically deemed inappropriate or pathetic by ghetto gatekeepers and have been lexicalized in the pejorative slang terms "wigga" and "wanksta."

now where some kid from the 'burbs—or somebody from the inner-city even—will throw on a Snoop Dogg shirt or dress however they think a rapper is supposed to dress and go down the street and don't know nothing about [pioneering Bronx DJ] Kool Herc, you know what I'm sayin'?" (personal communication)

As suggested by Banjoko's inclusion of the "inner city" as a place of potential dilettantism, street knowledge or one's exposure to the struggles of the 'hood come into play cursorily if at all. Blackness carries cultural capital, but is not definitive of being an underground hip-hop head. Of primary importance is the demonstration of an adequately anti-corporate, anti-establishment stance. Carnivalesque displays of consumption or professed aspirations toward "baller status" are anathema in backpacker circles, and certainly would not fly as a form of "immanent" social critique that I argued hardcore rappers employ in Chapter Two. Markedly more "transcendent" critiques (Lipsitz 1994:25) of the mainstream—of hyper-materialism, unoriginality, and corporate hegemony, for example—dominate discourse within the backpacker scene. Such critiques echo two powerful discursive domains from which backpackers draw cultural logic: that of leftist "revolutionary" thought and high modernism. Both presuppose the possibility of some utopic outside realm: a realm of "pure" cultural production, or "art for art's sake," where art divorces itself from commerce and the attendant technologies of "mass production" (Adorno & Horkheimer 1979) or "mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin 1968), enabling the creation of truly original, non-derivative works; a realm of liberated social relations in which "the people" free themselves from their despotic/imperialist/oligarchic oppressors and develop societies based upon non-alienated forms of labor and production.

Leftist revolutionary discourse, particularly the jargon of the 1960s and 1970s New Left and ethnic-pride movements, provides an organizing frame, specifically, for the aspect of backpacker hip-hop known as conscious rap. The term "conscious"—also commonly used to modify the words "rapper," "MC," and "hip-hop"—refers to an expressive orientation in which emphasis is placed upon positive transformation through heightened social, political, and/or spiritual "consciousness" (Allen Jr. 1996; Decker 1994; Cheney 2005). Because the Bay Area served as a nexus for so many New Left and identity-based organizing efforts—most famously that of Oakland's Black Panthers, Berkeley's free-speech activists, and the Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State University—perhaps it is unsurprising that an unusually large number of the hip-hop's most prominent conscious-rap artists hail from the region, including the Coup, Zion I, Blackalicious, Lyrics Born, Hieroglyphics, Mystik, Saafir, Paris, T-KASH, Conscious Daughters, the Crown City Rockers, Azeem, the Cali Agents, and Living Legends crewmembers the Grouch, Mystik Journeymen, and Bicasso. Quickly joining the ranks of these established and critically acclaimed artists are a host of up-and-coming rap acts I encountered during my fieldwork: Ise Lyfe, Rico Pabon, Melina Jones, Nate Mezmer, Native Guns, Jern Eye, Los Rakas, BRWN BFLO, Lady Tragik, Fiyawata, and the Attik, who represent a sampling of the continuously new waves of local conscious hip-hop innovation.

Representing the most politicized wing of the backpacker camp, conscious hip-hop heads differ somewhat from other backpackers who are involved solely in "four pillar" formalism, or "art-for-art's-sake." (Turntablists or breakdancers, for example, interested in advancing their art form, not in making any political statement.) For

conscious hip-hoppers, "consciousness" centers on awareness of social struggle and, in many cases, involvement in political movements among marginalized peoples. Several of my consultants in fact criticized other backpackers for being overly concerned with hip-hop's formal elements while remaining ignorant about more pressing issues in communities of color (which, after all, have historically been wellsprings of hip-hop culture). In the estimation of radical white rapper Nate Mezmer, "You have these hip-hop historians who waste way too much time talking about the four elements…In the hood it's real bad now. And in middle-class communities they're real disconnected with what's going on in the 'hood. So I think it's important to know about what went on in the past…but [more so] what went on in the United States with politics and race relations, rather than just hip-hop." Adisa Banjoko concurs, adding that knowledge of hip-hop's political history is sorely lacking among most backpackers:

> You have to know about Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaataa, but then you would also have to know that what was happening in Oakland with the Black Panthers was just as important, and what was happening in L.A. with the Watts Riots was just as important, and how all of that played a role not just in the artists that it created but in the nature of their content. What was the nature of their content? So that's what I think is lacking in today's hip-hop community.

Drawing from 1960s and 1970s leftist radicalism, conscious-rap themes range from historical-materialist critiques of institutional oppression and power (including the homogenizing power of the music industry) to calls for community organizing and self-determination to more personal messages about self-actualization and individual enlightenment. According to local journalist Adrienne Anderson, a key contributor to the influential but now-defunct Bay Area hip-hop magazine *4080*,

> Conscious and political rappers are looking more at the "why" than just trying to get what somebody else has. The conscious/political rappers are more concerned with problem-solving and educating rather than buying a Lexus, a fur coat for their dog, or being "iced out." From what I've been listening to from conscious/political rappers, is that everyone can "come up," but other rappers seem fixated on "getting theirs." (personal communication)

While emphasizing themes that hearken to the New Left era, conscious rap nonetheless surfaced during an articulation of social and economic circumstances particular to the 1980s, and is undeniably a unique product of the post-Civil Rights, "post-soul" hip-hop generation (Kitwana 2002; Neal 2002; George 2001). Anderson, an African American who grew up in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district after its hippie apex, periodizes conscious rap's 1980s emergence thusly:

> When the Reagan-era was in full effect, and it was all about the "me-me" consumerism of the '80s, that's when political rap started making more sense. It seemed to evolve with what was going on in my neighborhood and friends at the time: i.e., gentrification, self-definition, knowledge of self, etc. In hindsight, I'm sure it was all a response to the negative view being put on African Americans through Reagan's "War on Drugs" and other policies.

In her historicization of conscious rap's advent, Anderson highlights a heightened period of inequality in San Francisco and in the U.S. generally, a period in which significant numbers of economically enfranchised "yuppie" baby-boomers—now, ironically, members of the establishment many of them railed against in the 1960s—continued the process of "reverse white flight" from the suburbs back into cosmopolitan but increasingly deindustrialized cities, while blue-collar Americans experienced downward mobility and dislocation due to job flight, social-service cutbacks, skyrocketing housing costs, and increasingly punitive law-enforcement policies.

In San Francisco, this set of circumstances manifested, for one, in the transformation of the hippie bastion of the Haight-Ashbury into an up-market shopping district for faux-flower children—the "gentrification" Anderson alludes to. Juxtaposing her Haight-Ashbury upbringing with her hip-hop affinities, she points to a significant generational shift in leftist protest culture: a move away from the rock-and-roll wails and gospel-soul bellows of the New Left and Civil Rights movements toward an entirely new aesthetic of rebellion garnering growing relevance among young people, especially working-class youth of color, who in the 1980s experienced the beginnings of a structural assault on their wellbeing that continued for decades. Anderson concludes, "A lot of rappers became unwitting leaders because they were outside of the sixties model, and were using a new medium to communicate."

Although by "new medium" Anderson refers specifically to rapping, the emergence of conscious rap she describes in the late 1980s coincides with a move among young urbanites to revitalize and preserve all four of hip-hop's distinctive elements or "pillars": rapping/MCing, DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti/aerosol art (which initially each held equal status). The term "backpacker" primarily serves to distinguish those persons who view themselves simultaneously as preservationists of one or all of the four original pillars and avant-gardists advancing those forms into the future. Backpackers presume the need for continued cultural stewardship efforts within the hip-hop arts, contending the intensified commercialization of rap music has lead to a denigration of the art of MCing, a collapse in the quality of contemporary rap, and, finally, an overshadowing or even devaluing of hip-hop's three other fundamental "old school" elements.

While the origin of the term "backpacker" is somewhat indeterminate, most heads link it to a specific moment in hip-hop history: the so-called "golden era" of the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this fabled "golden age," politically progressive conscious rap proliferated and proved momentarily profitable. Some of the acts associated with this period include radical rappers KRS-1, Public Enemy, and the Bay Area's own Paris; black nationalists Brand Nubian, X-Clan, and Poor Righteous Teachers; and rootsy conscious acts A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, the Jungle Brothers, and Queen Latifah. Hip-hop intellectuals often refer to this moment as a crossroads in hip-hop culture as it entered its second decade of existence; they view it as a lost opportunity for the hip-hop nation to coalesce as a unified, politically enlightened cultural movement. When the hardcore L.A. gangsta rap crew N.W.A. exploded "straight outta Compton"—setting a new standard for the popularization of thuggery and urban anomie that would dominate hip-hop from the 1990s onward—such hopes were all but lost…Or so the story goes. A decidedly elegiac tone underlies the "golden age" narrative, framed typically as a fall from grace wherein heavily commercialized forms of gangsta rap overtook more "pure" hip-hop expressions, which were forced to recede (and reseed) once more in the fertile underground.

As implied by the corrupting influence attributed to West Coast gangsta rappers, the very notion of a "backpacker underground" stems from an East Coast-centric hip-hop imaginary. The figure of the backpacker conjures images of an itinerant hip-hop hipster—typically male but of any race—meandering through the New York subways, slinking through cityspace on foot, armed with headphones (now attached to an iPod) and a knapsack full of gear: possibly spray-paint supplies necessary for his next outlaw

graffiti "burner" or homemade mixtapes for sale within the hand-to-hand underground music economy. This subterranean strategy differs markedly with the alternative economic routes forged by Too $hort and other West Coast hardcore rappers, who conducted business "out the trunk" of gas-guzzling Buicks and Cadillacs. Because of backpacker hip-hop's New York-centric orientation, car culture figures minimally when compared to the hardcore scenes of L.A., the Bay, and other sprawled cities in the South such as Houston, Miami, and Atlanta, where freeway arteries outnumber subway tracks and bottom-heavy auto acoustics matter more than high-fidelity headphone audio. As a result, backpacker music is said to have a crisper, brusquer sound than hardcore rap, whose languid G-funk "jeep beats" accentuate bass-driven sonic textures.

Backpacker hip-hop also carries connotations of school-going studiousness, sharply contrasting with the streetwise sensibilities of gangsta, mack, and thug rappers, who presumably acquire knowledge through direct visceral experience, through the "school of hard knocks," rather than through book learning, and would not be caught dead carrying a backpack (unless, perhaps, it was full of money or illicit merchandise).[59] Reinforcing the connection to an educated middle class, backpacker musicians appear frequently on the college-campus concert circuit and receive airtime primarily on college and public radio. Since the early 1980s, college radio has in fact played an integral role in the production of a self-sustaining Bay Area hip-hop scene. The region's unusual abundance in higher-education institutions creates ample opportunities for campus DJs,

[59] The duffle bag entered the hardcore hip-hop lexicon with the 2007 hit "Duffle Bag Boy," a collaboration between rap superstar Lil Wayne and Atlanta duo Player's Circle, in which Wayne describes a hustler moving illegal merchandise (drugs or weapons) in said satchel.

who create vital alternative channels for the dissemination of underground sounds.[60] Throughout my research, numerous consultants attested to the importance of independent radio stations in shaping their tastes and exposing them to various kinds of lesser-known hip-hop music. DJ Envigado, an Armenian-American DJ, stresses that, during his college years in the 1990s, these alternative local broadcasts "really kind of tied together the hip-hop community, especially underground heads. Those people kept hip-hop when it was getting kind of iffy. People started to develop tastes, and there started to be a mainstream taste that people weren't checking for. This was before people were going to the internet or anything. It was college radio. That was it" (personal communication).

Envigado rightly points out that, in the decades preceding the dotcom boom, college radio served as a primary means for the circulation of hip-hop information and arcana—cultural currency of the backpacker scene. In the information-based economy of

[60] Some local radio DJs have even become major players in hip-hop globally. While a student in the early 1980s at Stanford University, Kevvy Kev founded KZSU's "The Drum," the world's longest-running rap show. On-air personality, hip-hop pundit, and political activist Davey D began DJing as a Cal student at U.C. Berkeley's KALX before moving to Clear Channel-owned KMEL and, later, to his current post at KPFA. Irish-American rap iconoclast Billy Jam also started out at KALX in the mid 1980s, before founding the influential turntablist record label Hip-Hop Slam. So did award-winning journalist Jeff Chang, who moved from KALX to U.C. Davis' KDVS in the early 1990s, where he formed the influential Solesides music collective with then-college students DJ Shadow, Gift of Gab, Chief Xcel, Lyrics Born, and Lateef the Truthspeaker. International mixmaster J Boogie founded another of hip-hop's longest-running radio shows, KUSF's "Beatsauce" (1994-2008), while at the University of San Francisco. Although not technically a college station, Berkeley's KPFA—headquarters of the venerable Pacifica Radio progressive media network—has historically supported local hip-hop as well through syndicated programs such as "Hard Knock Radio" and "Friday Night Vibe."

The inclusion of hip-hop on radio airwaves—both commercial and public—has been a continual struggle in the Bay Area. Hip-hop journalist Eric K. Arnold offers incisive coverage of the racially charged politics of Bay Area hip-hop radio in numerous articles. On the demise of KALX's Gavin Award-winning "Sunday Morning Show," see "R.I.P., Berkeley Rap Radio" (2006); on "Hard Knock Radio's struggles amidst KPFA's "entrenchment of a hip-hop-hatin', folk-music-lovin', eco-commie clique of liberal elitists who have ironically railed against the hypocrisy of the System without recognizing their own institutional racism," see "Hard Times for Hard Knock" (2005). For further discussion of Clear Channel-owned KMEL's contentious history of consolidation, homogenization of programming, and bad community relations, see Arnold's report for the advocacy group Future of Music Coalition, "The Effects of Media Consolidation on Urban Radio" (http://72.27.230.165/article/article/effects-media-consolidation-urban-radio), as well as his article "The Demise of Hyphy" (2008).

the current digital age, backpacker heads are now more than ever expected "drop knowledge" on a variety of subjects. Elaborate encyclopedic displays of esoteric hip-hop lore serve as implicit repudiations of the mass-market mainstream: being able to recite, for example, the current roster of obscure rappers on the Definitive Jux indie record label, or recount the musical sources sampled on the early hip-hop breakbeat album, Malcolm McLaren's *Duck Rock* (1983). Such literacies work as a badges of authenticity for backpackers, whereas street-oriented heads might view these bookish fixations as nerdy and, in the case of male hip-hoppers, emasculating.

Male backpackers generally overcompensate for questions regarding their masculinity by issuing cutting critiques against sensationalistic thug rappers "selling out" or "getting pimped" by entertainment companies. Rarely do male backpackers openly acknowledge their vulnerability with regard to hypermasculine norms set by street rappers. Only once, and rather fleetingly, did I witness someone in the backpacker community invoke the issue of gender (non)conformity. It occurred during a panel discussion at an unusual event: the 2007 Hip-Hop, Chess & Life Strategies Exhibition, an urban chess tournament organized by Adisa Banjoko. A chess enthusiast himself, Banjoko insists rap is rife with chess references and lovers of the game. "I've always considered the relationship between chess and hip-hop like and intellectual dirty secret," Banjoko contends. "Some dudes…are ashamed to share their intellectual side. On the other side, chess is a very emotionally personal thing, so they tend not to share that side of themselves. I think it's a private way that people try to improve themselves" (personal communication). Banjoko nevertheless publicly proved chess' popularity among hip-hoppers by attracting high-profile attendees to the event, including Wu-Tang Clan's the

RZA, turntablist icon DJ Q-Bert, Hieroglyphics battle rapper Casual, and veteran college radio jock Kevvy Kev, who, during a panel discussion, sheepishly admitted "we were all pretty much nerds growing up." Kev went on to explain how chess appeals to his and his co-panelists' brainier sides, yet each had to deny such inclinations throughout most of their careers for fear of being perceived as "soft" or unmanly.

Both liberal and conservative cultural critics regularly target rap music for reinforcing harmful equations of intellectualism and education with weakness or inauthenticity within certain pockets of the African-American community, particularly among low-income young men.[61] Hip-hop scholar Jeffrey Ogbar concurs with criticisms of mainstream rap's restrictive definitions of racial authenticity and masculinity, but convincingly argues that claims about hip-hop's negative social impact are overstated: "[D]espite the alarm of those who argue that commercial hip-hop's pathological messages have deleteriously affected black people on any macro level, *there is no evidence*. In fact, if one looks at life expectancy, income, educational attainment, poverty rates, teenage birthrate, and infant mortality rates, *the hip-hop generation is the most affluent generation of black people in U.S. history*" (2009:128, emphasis in original).

Alarmist anti-rap diatribes also fail to acknowledge the existence of an entire counter-sphere of hip-hop that serves as safe haven for heads who cannot—or choose not to—conform to hardcore rap's more rigid race-, class-, and gender-encoded norms: especially whites, members of the college-educated middle class, and women who refuse

[61] Many such "culture war" critiques issue from the African-American community itself, from public commentators such as entertainer Bill Cosby, the late politician C. Delores Tucker, and writers John McWhorter, Stanley Crouch, and Clarence Page, a syndicated columnist and television pundit who argues "the standards of 'black authenticity' promulgated in hip-hop culture are not only too narrow but downright dangerous" (qtd. in Ogbar 2007:125).

to accept the rampant misogyny of contemporary street rap. I interviewed numerous female conscious MCs, and nearly all described the backpacker scene as a male-dominant sphere where women nonetheless could carve out social space and be taken seriously without being overly sexualized—or be taken seriously even if they choose to bring sensual or feminine elements into their performances (as Kanndi and Melina Jones described in Chapter Two).

Feminist artists find acceptance more readily in the backpacker sphere, given its valuation of oppositional and "progressive" points of view. One such artist, Zakiya, an Oakland educator and MC who makes up one half of the married rap duo Fiyawata, offered an especially astute commentary about mainstream rap's exploitation of female sexuality, which she attributes to misogynist tendencies not just in hip-hop but in the broader repressive attitudes of American culture:

> I always use the example of, like, dancing provocatively. In other cultures, or if you go into Africa or some Latin cultures, it's very common for women to dress, um, to dance provocatively. It's part of culture, it's part of how they dance. Little girls, even a little black girl who might not have even seen hip-hop, she might hear a drum beat. She might just start moving that pelvic area. That is part of our power center as women. However, in America it's always channeled into booty shaking. It's always channeled into a video ho. It's always channeled into something negative, degrading, oversexed—a sex object. Where in other cultures, it's a sense of empowerment, it's a sense of, it's not a sexual thing. And the men are used to it. They're not going crazy like "Oh my god, look at her booty!" It's not framed salaciously…And I think that's what they do to hip-hop. They just take it and they frame it in this other way that isn't uplifting, it's not empowering…So it's the content, but it's also the perception and the lens that it's put through. (personal communication)

Fellow educators Jen Soriano and Michelle "Crykit" Kolnik, who are both members of the all-female "b-girl" breakdance crew Sisterz of the Underground, make similar observations about race, gender performativity, and sexuality in the hip-hop dance

workshops they run at schools and youth centers throughout the Bay Area. Soriano remarks, "I have to compromise a lot. You know, I won't let them do certain movements that I feel are just not what they should be doing at that age…When I work with Latina girls and they want to shake their hips, and they don't see that as an insult. They see it as empowerment. And so sometimes I still let them do that. It's all in the context of where they're putting it in the dance" (personal communication). Through their work with the hip-hop arts organization Def Ed, Soriano and Crykit attempt to reach underserved youth through the "old school" element of breaking, a style of movement much less overtly sexual than the kinds of provocative choreography performed by women dancers in mainstream rap videos. Soriano and Crykit both attest that teaching breaking is difficult, given the popularity of newer urban dance styles (including the hyphy-affiliated "turfing," L.A.'s "krumping," and dance fads emerging from the South, including the playfully titled "tootsie roll," "pop, lock, and drop it," and the "stanky leg"). Their pedagogical dilemma constitutes yet another instance in which the earnest preservationist efforts of backpacker hip-hoppers contrast with the more spectacular, sexually charged aesthetics of commercial rap, which the majority of urban minority youth favor.

Unlike background dancers in mainstream music videos, who are primarily women, breakdancers or "breakers" are traditionally male, as implied by the preferred descriptor for dancers, "b-boys." Thus the athletic styles of movement associated with "b-boying" or breaking generally read as masculine and somewhat asexual—at least from a heteronormative patriarchal perspective. Because of this, "b-girls" such as Crykit find it difficult to break into the breaking scene. Crykit attests:

> It was hard starting out, because there aren't that many female b-girls. You go into it and you're scared. You want the boys to show you something, because there weren't many classes at that time. Just watching and trying to pick it up that way, you progress so slow…But to ask those boys—everybody's already so good, and they're doing their own thing, practicing with their crew. They don't necessarily want to take the time to show a bunch of girls some stuff.

By the time I met Crykit in 2007, however, she had indeed found a place for herself in breaking circles, having performed internationally and become the only female member of the dance crew Supreme Soul (who appeared on season two of MTV's reality series *America's Best Dance Crew*). The first time I saw her perform was a few months earlier, at the consummate Bay Area backpacker event known as Hip-Hop in the Park. Organized by the campus group U.C. Berkeley Students for Hip-Hop, the annual event takes place at Berkeley's People's Park, a site with a storied history linked to the Free Speech Movement of the late 1960s. Hip-Hop in the Park seems in some ways an extension of the sixties counterculture, attracting politically conscious performers and neo-bohemian backpackers from all over the Bay. When I attended in 2007, the community-minded event served as a fundraiser for the East Bay Chicano youth-activist organization Huaxtec, whose members circulated through the multiracial crowd eliciting donations, while two young African-American women, slam poet Chinaka Hodge and neo-soul songstress Jennifer Johns, hosted the onstage proceedings. Performers included Filipino rap duo Native Gunz, Asian-American MC Jern Eye, and African American recording artists Ise Lyfe and the Attik.

Hip-Hop in the Park struck me as the closest thing to a multiethnic, multicultural, multimedia utopia forming the basis of backpackers' idealistic imagined community. In addition to the music stage, organizers attempted to highlight each of the four artistic

pillars equally. On one end of the park stood eight full-scale spray-paint burners, executed throughout the day as a form of live art by skatepunk-looking graffiti "writers," who appeared to be Latino and Asian. A testament to local pride and the embrace of all things eccentric, one of the pieces featured a portrait of Shock G, the mackedelic oddball MC from the 1990s Oakland rap group Digital Underground, best known by his comic alter ego, "Humpty Hump." On the opposite edge of the park, a DJ booth featured multiple mix-masters and impromptu freestyle rappers, flanked by a dance area designated by slick-surfaced vinyl mats for breakers.

It is there, under the pounding summer sun, that I first spotted Crykit, drenched in sweat but holding her own in a competitive "cipher" (a term used in hip-hop to describe competitive circles of improvisational MCs or dancers). A petite, porcelain-skinned redhead, Crykit undoubtedly stood out in the crowd of breakers, but not as much as one might think. Competitors included diehard Asian b-boys, boho black undergrads, another young woman who was Latina, and a Caucasian hipster dressed in a white t-shirt and white jeans (neither of which were oversized), whose only marked hip-hop signifiers were his vintage Nike "dunks" and his dexterous moves. I offer this description as further evidence that backpackers come to hip-hop from various backgrounds and walks of life that often diverge sharply from the inner-city streets and 'hoods most commonly associated with rap music and culture.

Crykit herself grew up in a place about as far off the hip-hop "mattering map" as one can get: a small farm in rural Wisconsin. She describes her upbringing as fairly isolated. Since there was no cable TV available in the area, she had little access to hip-hop media and music videos. She remembers listening to radio, through which she

became a fan of pioneering women rappers Salt-N-Pepa and Queen Latifah, whose music she used for dance routines she developed as a girl. She also recalls attempting to incorporate hip-hop moves into choreography for her junior-high cheerleading squad. Realizing as a teenager she needed to hone her talents in more urban environments, Crykit attests that, by the time she received her driver's license, "I was like 'bing, outta here!' [pointing to the door]. Driving to Chicago, I was right in the middle. Chicago was about an hour away, Milwaukee was like 45 minutes away, so I did have those cities accessible to me."

As a young adult, Crykit describes herself as utterly immersed in the hip-hop lifestyle, and dedicated to the art of breaking: "Breaking is my life. Like, sneakers are my life, and collecting records—like everything is just, I've become totally absorbed in it." Yet she expresses ambivalence about her standing within in the hip-hop community, and self consciousness about the racial dimension inherent to her lifestyle choices:

> I don't know, it's hard for me, growing up on a farm. Sometimes I wonder what people think about me, since I haven't grown up with hip-hop, and being white especially. I just feel like, hmm, am I fully connecting with these folks? It's funny, I was just at this community event over in the Fillmore. I was one of the only white girls there, right? And we had a little dance circle, and all I could hear was "Ooo, that girl get funky! That white girl can dance!" [chuckles]. And I'm like, "OK, yeah, I can," you know? I really can. I love what I'm doing. It comes from my heart.

For whites working in the backpacker sphere, racial issues can largely be evaded as long as one demonstrates sincere dedication to hip-hop's elements and forms, as Crykit does in making such declarations and, more importantly, through practice, performance, and active involvement in the artistic community. As suggested in her statement, Crykit's racial outsiderness becomes far more marked when she, admirably, attempts to broaden her community involvement outside the backpacker sphere to include outreach to youth

in low-income, largely African-American neighborhoods, such as the one she visited in the Fillmore. In this ‘hoodspace context, African Americans “called out” her whiteness, unsettling dominant Western ideologies which normalize whiteness and posit it as a race-neutral “unmarked” social category (Frankenberg 1993; Harris 1997; Hartigan 2005; Lipsitz 1995); she was literally hailed or “interpellated” as white, to use the Althusserian term. But this hailing was not done maliciously, to prohibit or proscribe her involvement, but simply to mark it—or, better, to *re*mark upon Crykit’s surprising presence, given the many inhibiting forces working against interracial and trans-class relations in U.S. society. Oftentimes hip-hop’s ability to facilitate meaningful moments of exchange between diverse, differently privileged groups can, in fact, be remarkable.

Even when white hip-hop heads choose to stay within the more comfortable confines of the backpacker camp, inevitable ironies, disjunctions, contradictions, and conflicts arise, given a fundamental fact: backpacker hip-hop makes room for people from divergent backgrounds to participate in a cultural formation marked as black. One of the most literal instances of such cultural dissonances occurred at a performance I attended of the Oakland conscious hip-hop group the Coup one random Wednesday evening in April 2007. Promoted through internet networking and word-of-mouth only, the one-off concert was preparation for the band’s appearance at the massive Coachella Music Festival later that month, where they would perform on the same bill as alternative rock idols Rage Against the Machine, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Bjork. The Coup’s hometown concert was decidedly smaller scale, set at a nonprofit performance space in West Oakland called New Black World Social Aid & Pleasure Club. Located in the low-income “Lower Bottoms” neighborhood, the club sits slightly west of the notorious

Acorn Projects in an area infamous for high levels of crime and violence. Nevertheless, the Lower Bottoms is also a steadily gentrifying sector of West Oakland where artists and Burning Man bohemians are increasingly renting and purchasing deindustrialized warehouses properties and transforming them into spacious live-work lofts. New Black World's founder, African-American poet, MC, community activist, and social entrepreneur Marcel Diallo has been one of the most outspoken critics of gentrification in his neighborhood. Since the early 2000s, he has been working to counteract the forces of displacement through the creation of a "Village Bottoms" black cultural district, sustained through Afrocentric-themed arts and black-owned small-business development projects in the area. Some accuse Diallo of espousing racial separatism in his work to revitalize the neighborhood, although such accusations appear overstated (Stuhldreher 2007; Swan 2008).

Separatist or not, when one enters the New Black World, the Afro-Diasporic presence is immediately apparent. A cross between a West Oakland juke joint and a Candomblé temple, the narrow, moodily lit space features a small bar (where patrons can order drinks and vegetarian "Afro Soul" snacks) and an elevated, altar-like stage, on which sit various candles and artifacts, including a large Congolese nkisi "nail fetish" statue. Enlarged sepia-toned photos of Lower Bottoms residents from generations past adorn the walls, as do vintage portraits of New Orleans "social aid and pleasure clubs" (i.e. "second line" funeral-parade marching groups) from which the venue derives its name. In this setting, the Coup's pro-black, politically progressive music seemed entirely in synch, as did opening act Bicasso, an underground rapper who, like the Coup's Afro-sporting frontman Boots Riley, is a longtime associate of Diallo's.

What seemed dissonant was the constitution of the audience: predominantly white hipster and neo-hippie fans of the Coup, who admire Boots' socially conscious lyricism and comprise the majority of the group's following. The concert went off smoothly, with little sign of tension between audience, performer, or proprietor (although one has to wonder what Diallo was thinking as the nattily dressed, aloof impresario skulked through the crowd). The most disjunctive moment came early in the evening, during Bicasso's set, when the African-American rapper raised his fist in a militant gesture recalling the Black Pride movement and chanted "stay black"—seemingly without irony. Given Bicasso's enthusiastic performance and good rapport with the audience, the ambiguous gesture did not appear particularly confrontational. On some level, "stay black" carried similar resonances to the common hip-hop proclamation "keep it real." In hardcore-rap spheres, blackness often serves as a metonym for realness or authenticity, but in backpacker circles the call to "keep it real" does not necessarily connote anything racial. So the use of the term "black" by Bicasso, a member of the consummate California backpacker rap crew the Living Legends, was perplexing. Was it was a passive-aggressive taunt? A shift into a more "gangsta" persona? Or a "golden era" throwback to more Afro-militant modes of performance? More than anything, it seemed as if he was in total denial of the crowd's make-up.

The issue of white audiences—or its converse, the lack of black fans—is a touchy subject for conscious MCs. This is especially true for African American artists who, like the Coup, have graduated beyond the point of performing at small local clubs and cultural centers (where multiracial crowds do often mingle) and entered the international touring circuit, where concert promoters market backpacker hip-hop to the same (predominately

white) college and urban-elite crowds as "indie" and "underground" rock. For African-American conscious rappers, acknowledging a limited black fan base seems to threaten their sense of "racial authenticity," an overly rigid yet widely accepted assessment of blackness that cultural anthropologist John L. Jackson critiques in his ethnographic writings on Harlem: "Authenticity models the real on what is observable, empirical. It is the real as phenotypic expression, a realness verifiable by the eye. It is the hip-hop of gesticulations and genealogies: do you come from the street or the suburbs? Do you have the walk? The talk? The swagger? The verifiable experience…?" (2005:196). Within this paradigm, black rappers' ability to attract other African-American listeners serves as empirical, quantifiable evidence of their "racial authenticity." Failing such "authenticity tests" (Jackson 2005:17) proves troublesome and even alienating for African-American hip-hop artists in the Bay Area who still, by and large, base their lives in the black communities they came from. (Boots Riley, for example, owns a home in West Oakland's Lower Bottoms.)

Occasionally some of these artists would tackle the thorny issue with me, confiding a sense of frustration over the bifurcated realities of their living and working lives, but only after considerable trust had been established between us. Such a conversation occurred during a day I spent accompanying the internationally successful conscious-rap group Zion I and their manager/label head Tim House to a community appearance at a Boys & Girls club. Afterwards, they invited me to eat dinner with them (take-out burritos) at their studio space in East Oakland. Our casual conversation ran the gamut of topics, but hit upon the subject of sex and relationships when their label intern, an aspiring Mexican-American MC named Joseph (a.k.a. "Rhymewell"), asked MC Zion

for some advice about a girl he was "talking to" (which in Gen Y-speak means dating, but maintaining one's status as single); apparently, the young woman wanted a greater commitment from Joseph. Zion, a black man who is at least ten years Joseph's senior, shared some thoughtful words, and then deferred to me for the female perspective. (I was the only woman in the room.)

Zion's inclusion of me in the conversation, and his generally open and affable demeanor toward me during a day in which I felt very much an interloper emboldened me to ask more personal questions at that point, specifically about the gender and sexual politics of "the road." My intent was not to pry for prurient reasons but to inquire how gender relations *really* played out among male conscious rappers, who frequently assume pro-feminist postures—professing to "respect women" and love their "black queens"—but undeniably work in male-dominated terrain, and often find themselves in the sexually charged contexts of concert tours and backstage parties. Specifically, I asked Zion whether he or his group has any "groupies," thinking surely they did, given Zion I's stature in the underground hip-hop scene and Zion's charisma as a performer—not to mention his chiseled good looks. His response surprised me. He said his most ardent fans were, by far, young white males. I asked if he meant gay men, and he responded no, just zealous backpacker hip-hop heads who "want to talk and hang out after shows, and dump all their personal issues out" on him, as if he was some sort of hip-hop sage. As an artist, Zion certainly cultivates an image of himself as spiritually minded, socially engaged, and emotionally grounded. But the sense of displeasure he conveyed in describing these fans' affection implied a psychosexual and racial undercurrent in the exchange that he found mildly distasteful. He described one particular incident, relayed to him by Latino

bandmate Deuce Eclipse, in which a white male fan asked Deuce to autograph his girlfriend's posterior. Apparently the young man was more enthusiastic about the idea than his female companion, as if her body could stand in for his own desire while maintaining heteronormative order. (I failed to ask whether Deuce obliged.)

I understood Zion's reaction to such situations not as homophobic or racist, but as justifiably wary of white "fanboy" adoration, wherein Zion and his peers become tokens for all that is appealingly exotic and deeply authentic—a dynamic that echoes Simon Frith's description of Anglo cultural studies scholars' obsession with black youth subcultures and "the figure of the African" (1992:180). Moreover, because MC Zion displays a level of emotional vulnerability in song lyrics that are unusual within the braggadocio-and-bluster-tone of most rap music, it seems to invite or give license to fanboys to approach him with "personal" issues. While he deemed Joseph's advice-seeking as perfectly appropriate, when such appeals come from overeager young white fans who are essentially strangers to him, it pushes him to the limit of where he wants to connect both interracially and homosocially, perhaps challenging his own sense of "racial authenticity" as well as his masculinity, as a conscious rapper with a sensitive side who nonetheless needs to stay legit in the macho, black-dominated domain of MCing.

I witnessed other instances in which whites' involvement in hip-hop fully stepped over the (continually negotiated, ambiguously drawn) line of legitimate participation and proper racial respect, to the point where missteps needed to be policed. Such was the case on the night I went to KPFA radio studios in Berkeley to interview T-KASH, host of the midnight hip-hop music and community-affairs talk show, "Friday Night Vibe." T-KASH is also a highly regarded conscious rapper with unassailable pro-black credentials,

including being a onetime member of the Coup as well as a protégée of legendary "golden era" black-nationalist rapper Paris (whose independent music label, Guerilla Funk Records, T-KASH is signed to). Rather fortuitously for me, as someone interested interracial relations within hip-hop, T-KASH invited me to the studio on the same night he was set to interview John Brown, the shamelessly self-promotional runner-up on the 2007 VH1 reality-television series *The White Rapper Show*. In what appeared to be an ambush, T-KASH asked his close friend, the ever-outspoken and Afrocentric Adisa Banjoko, to join them in this on-air debate. Officially billed as a "conversation about the white hip-hop presence," the night's program offered an opportunity to, as Banjoko jokingly referred to it, "clown John Brown"—to "call out" Brown for what Banjoko and T-KASH both viewed as his foolish behavior on the television show, on which Brown incessantly repeated the provocative but perplexingly incongruous taglines "ghetto revival" and "king of the suburbs."

As suggested by his name, John Brown professes to be an ally to African Americans, but failed to convince most black viewers of this. The son of ultraliberal parents who purposely gave him that name, Brown lived in Berkeley during early childhood but spent most of his young-adult years in the middle-class college town of Davis, California. His televisual attempts to represent both the "ghetto" and the "suburbs" irritated many viewers, given his familiarity solely with the latter domain. In his efforts to have it both ways, to claim authenticity via the logics of both the hardcore-street sphere (where "realness" equals street knowledge and 'hood affiliation) and the backpacker camp (where "realness" equals sincerity and dedication to hip-hop), Brown canceled out

his credibility in either area, since “fronting” (falsifying or being dishonest about one’s experience) is strictly prohibited throughout the entirety of the hip-hop nation.

In the hour leading up to the “Friday Night Vibe” broadcast, I interviewed T-KASH while he occasionally paused to call a conspicuously absent John Brown, leaving urgent messages. When it became apparent that the “White Rapper” runner-up was a no-show, T-KASH and Banjoko proceeded, undaunted, into the recording booth, put their headphones on, and commenced their heated conversation about whiteness and multiraciality in hip-hop. The discussion began with an opening salvo T-KASH issued to Banjoko: “Can we both assume that, with respect to everybody else, other communities, it still is the black community when it comes to hip-hop?”

Banjoko’s response was in some ways surprising. He began, like T-KASH, with the basic premise that hip-hop began—and fundamentally remains—rooted in the black community. But the rest of his argument was somewhat more ambiguous, reflecting the ways in which hip-hop simultaneously generates openings and closures in relations between racial groups. In Banjoko’s estimation, that fact of black authorship does not necessarily preclude involvement by other races and ethnicities; he in fact singled out as local exemplars of appropriate non-black participation the Filipino conscious-rap duo Native Gunz and Nate Mezmer, a highly political white MC. Admittance into what Banjoko metaphorically refers to as the “house” of hip-hop, however, requires a certain amount of deference.

> I think the issue is respect and control. Who’s respecting it and who’s controlling it. Meaning that you’ve got a lot of white cats who get into hip-hop all day, and they’re like, “Well, hip-hop started black, but it’s kind of universal now, bro! [spoken in a mock-surfer accent] You know, I got the mic now, bro. You can’t take it out of my

> hand. I'm gonna do my thing." I'm like, alright, go ahead and do your thing, but don't think you're gonna come into my house and disrespect me.

Banjoko, an adherent to various forms of Eastern philosophy, draws a martial-arts analogy to illustrate his notion of cultural provenance. "It's like if someone's doing Judo—it's a global sport, but it came from Japan. Don't think that you're gonna be Russian, or from the U.K., or from America, and diss the Japanese because you're a black belt in Judo. Always show respect in the house. Always."

This comparison aptly captures the complex social dynamics of hip-hop, a cultural arena marked as a space of blackness that nevertheless sprawls beyond racially rigid confines, no matter how fervently any one group lays claims to it or attempts to hem it in. In comparing hip-hop to Judo, Banjoko offers a practical framework within which to understand how, exactly, non-African Americans negotiate legitimate entry into the "house" of hip-hop (or fail to do so, in the case of John Brown)—how it is, indeed, possible to "come correct"; in other words, to cross through fraught racial thresholds without trespassing or "crossing the line" inappropriately, as someone who barges through guarded entryways while lacking proper credentials. Banjoko elaborates on what these credentials might be in the following reprobation:

> Part of the problem with hip-hop's fake and phony multicultural banter is [white] cats don't know nothing about race. And they're afraid to confront it. Meaning cats weren't really sincere in what they was doing. Cats will go to the hip-hop show and be like, "Yeah man, I am hip-hop too, bro!" [spoken again with "surfer" inflection] For real? OK, so then here comes Monday when they're at work, and the black dude's catching hell from the boss, and are they saying anything? Noooo. Keep the status quo. "I ain't fighting for that black dude, man. I want my paycheck."

Following Banjoko's admonitory logic, the requirements for proper cultural "passing" among non-black hip-hoppers can be summarized by these closely related

precepts: 1) respect for African Americans, 2) deference toward African Americans' proprietary claims on hip-hop, 3) concern for the plight of black communities, 4) awareness of inequality, 5) acknowledgement of white privilege, and 6) commitment to racial justice. A discernable code of conduct exists here, but one that differs from the "code of the streets" more closely associated with the hardcore-rap sphere, in which individuals seek legitimacy and respect through firsthand familiarity with the 'hood. Banjoko's hip-hop "house" rules are clearly more suitable to the backpacker camp, which welcomes heads from a variety of 'hood and non-'hood backgrounds. The primary requirement for entry is a display of proper sentiments: a combination of the aforementioned qualities of earnestness, dedication, humility, concern, awareness—which all hinge upon personal sincerity.

Sincerity, as a "public sentiment" (Cvetkovich & Pelligrini 2003), manifests occasionally through demonstrable, outward acts—in this case, activities that reveal one's devotion to hip-hop culture and, by extension (as Banjoko attests), the struggle of African Americans; for example, participation in "old school" preservation efforts like Crykit's breakdancing workshops, or social-justice organizing work in communities of color (which many of my backpacker consultants are involved in). Otherwise, sincerity operates on an internal, subjective register, and has to be accepted by interlocutors on good faith, knowing full well that it can be faked, as Banjoko and T-KASH suspected of John Brown.

Backpacker hip-hop's sincerity-based model for cultural interaction corresponds to John Jackson's notion of "racial sincerity," the paradigm he offers for thinking about race beyond the more constrictive social mechanisms of "racial authenticity," which rely

on empirically verifiable notions of realness: "Sincerity and authenticity have very different ways of imagining the real, different ways of 'keeping it real,' and so *racial* sincerity…exemplifies an epistemologically distinct rendering of race, identity, solidarity, and reality" (2005:12, emphasis in original). He elaborates further on the differences between the two conceptualizations of race:

> Authenticity attempts to domesticate sincerity, rein it in, control its excesses. It demands hard, fast, and absolute sure-footedness, whereas racial sincerity wallows in unfalsifiability, ephemerality, partiality, and social vulnerability…[O]ne still does not know if one can trust the other's performances…[H]owever, one recognizes that people are not simply racial objects (to be verified from without) but racial subjects with an interiority that is never completely and unquestionably clear. (18)

Within Jackson's sincerity paradigm, race is understood as a precarious performance rather than a seamless production. Each interlocutor stands in an unstable subject location rather than on an objectified perch; they are agents whose identity depends not on an indisputable essence (like phenotype, genetics, birthright, etc.) but, rather, on their ability to appeal to like-minded others, to affect feelings of communality through gestures, words, deeds, intimations, utterances, etc.

There remains, however, an underlying tension between the more forgiving standards of sincerity and the harsher strictures of authenticity that racial-performativity theories never fully resolve: by its very nature, performance implies a public display that assumes the presence of a spectator, one who evaluates, scrutinizes, and, ultimately, objectifies. So in the multiracial sphere of backpacker hip-hop, expressions of racial sincerity are themselves judged and put through a kind of "authenticity test" by spectators. Crykit certainly passed the test in her convivial exchange with African-American dance-workshop participants in the Fillmore. John Brown failed in the minds

of T-KASH and Banjoko, as did the white hip-hoppers who refused to stand up for their black coworker in Banjoko's example of "cats [who] weren't really sincere in what they was doing." Often in situations involving the assessment of whites' sincerity by African Americans, the difference between word and deed becomes important: whether someone is willing to back up declarations of interracial affinity with action—an expectation suggested in the timeworn phrase in black communities, "your word is bond" (which evolved into hip-hop variants such as "word," "word up," "word to your mother," etc. [Alim 2006:106]). In the case of MC Zion, white male fans sometimes seem too sincere, or too earnest, while at the same time ignorant of the ways in which they may be fetishizing black and brown backpacker rappers as stand-ins for the exotic, the authentic, the "real," the spiritually and culturally "deep"—as an antidote to the putative predicaments of postmodernity: flattened surfaces, floating signifiers, simulated real(s), waning affects. Finally, Bicasso's pronouncement to "stay black" to the mostly white crowd suggests how highly ambiguous racial performances can be, and how difficult it is sometimes to detect sincerity: as a member of that audience, I did not know if we were being clowned, reprimanded, or welcomed momentarily into the figurative fold of blackness.

In emphasizing these more affective, subjective aspects of racial identification, Jackson opens up more space for understanding the kinds of interracial intersubjectivity I observed repeatedly while spending time in backpacker hip-hop circles. In such circles, racially sincere performances require rigorous levels of preparation, and oftentimes must withstand harsh evaluation by hip-hop stakeholders, but nonetheless remain open to just about anyone who wants to step up onstage and do the work.

Chapter Five

Black and Tan Realities:
Latinos in the Borderlands of the Hip-Hop Nation

order to grapple with the weighty, under-explored issue of ethnoracial diversity within hip-hop, I have chosen to focus on U.S. Latinos, who represent the largest non-white[62] population regionally, statewide, and in the nation. Latino "heads" in the U.S. provide an especially rich illustration of the complex racial dynamics of both the hip-hop nation and of the United States as a whole because they occupy an interstitial racial location that falls in between (and thus confounds) the black-white binary logic dominating national racial discourse. Much like African Americans and Asians, Latinos have undeniably been racialized throughout U.S. history, as frequent targets of bigotry, scapegoating, and various "moral panics" (Alvarez 2009; Gomez 2008; Katzew & Deans-Smith 2009; Molina 2006; Ramirez 2009). Nevertheless, according to the U.S. Census, the label "Latino" or "Hispanic" (the latter being the preferred institutional term) constitutes not a racial grouping but, rather, an ethnic category which can include members of any of the five officially recognized races: 1) "White," 2) "Black or African American," 3) "American Indian or Alaska Native," 4) "Asian, and Native Hawaiian," or 5) "Other Pacific Islander." Notwithstanding the minority of Afro-Latinos, Amerindians, and Asian-Latinos who identify clearly with one of the aforementioned racial groups, the majority of U.S. Latinos fit uneasily into any one Census-defined racial category. Rather,

[62] This distinction in relation to whiteness is complex, given Latinos/Hispanics are not recognized by the U.S. Census as a racial group but, rather, are considered an ethnicity. However, the Census mandates federal agencies designate two ethnicities in surveys: "Hispanic or Latino" and "Not Hispanic or Latino,"

they trace their mixed lineage to the violent history of encounter between native *indios* and European imperialists during the Spanish colonial era. Whereas in Mexico and numerous other Latin American countries, this mixed or "mestizo" heritage forms the basis of the dominant national identity, U.S. Latinos find themselves in a racially ambiguous, contradictory netherworld as, on the one hand, a people without race (according to state-sponsored demography) and, on the other, an intensely racialized group subject to brutal xenophobic attack (at the level of lived experience). (Akers Chacón & Davis 2006; Chavez 2008; Oboler 1995; O'Brien 2008; Rodriguez 2000).

Numerous scholars have taken this "*ni aqui ni allá*" ("neither here nor there") positioning as a starting point from which to develop powerful insights into the unique political, social, and cultural perspectives of Latinos. Of particular interest here are the works of Chicano cultural critics who use the U.S.-Mexico border as literal and figurative inspiration for developing "thirdspace" (Bhabha 1994) conceptualizations of identity and culture. Gloria Anzaldua describes these in-between places as the "borderlands," which she characterizes as simultaneously conflict-laden and culturally generative. In the opening paragraph of her famous work *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Anzaldua compares the U.S.-Mexico border to

> *una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against he first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture…A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* [the crossed, cross-bred] live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." (3)

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implicitly acknowledging how Latinos are racialized as non-white "others" in the U.S. (Source: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/1997standards.html)

For Anzaldua this concept of borderlands can be understood expansively to include not just the geographical region in and around Mexico's northern boundary and the southernmost parts of the U.S., but any space—physical, cultural, psychological, political—where misfits and the marginal assemble, where opposing elements collide to create something newly hybridized.

Chicano cultural theorist Jose David Saldívar develops a similar paradigm of hybridity in his notion of the "*transfrontera* contact zone," which he links to postmodern cultural forms (bricolage, pastiche, *rasquachismo*) and global flows (labor migration, media circulation, transnational capital): "[W]hereas modernism's border patrol once kept the barbarians out and safeguarded the culture within, there is now only liminal ground, which may prove fertile for some and slimy for others" (Saldívar 1997:21). Saldívar's notion of the "transfrontera contact zone" draws heavily from an older anthropological concept of the limen, or liminality, described by symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner as the spaces falling "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (qtd. in Saldívar 1997:98). Following Turner, Saldívar describes the limen not just as a threshold or "interstitial stage" to be passed through, but rather a permanent and "lived socially symbolic space" (99). It is the difference between older paradigms of immigration wherein the individual goes through an acculturation process and emerges fully assimilated, as a citizen of a new nation, versus thirdspace conceptualizations of culture that acknowledge the multilayered complexities of identity and experience—particularly for immigrants and those who dwell near borders of any kind. According to Turner, "liminality should be looked upon not only as a transition between states but as a state in itself, for there exist individuals,

groups, or social categories for which the 'liminal' moment turns into a permanent condition" (qtd. in Saldívar 1997:98).

The following case study frames hip-hop for Bay Area Latinos as a *transfrontera* contact zone where the social experiences of people racially marked as "brown" converge with those of black populations, creating culturally conjunctural urban identities. Of particular interest here are Chicanos, who comprise nearly 70 percent of all Latinos at the local, state, and national level, and have long been key contributors to a dynamic, hybrid urban expressive culture in major California cities such as San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, and Sacramento. Such contributions manifest most strikingly in the historical movements of the Pachuco, "cholo" lowriders, and Chicano *movimiento* radicals, who helped author a sense of California subcultural cool in the postwar era. In each such case, cultural historians point to significant ways in which brown and black influences overlap: in Pachucos and African-American hipsters wearing zoot suits and dancing to swing and doo-wop music (Alvarez 2007; Alvarez 2009; Garcia 1998; Lipsitz 1990; Macias 2008; Loza 1993); in the shared car-culture obsessions and "oldies," R&B, and funk musical tastes and of cholos, black inner-city youth, and gangster rappers (Cross 1993; Johnson 2002; Kelly 1993; Lipsitz 1990; Loza 1993; McCarthy 2004; Rodriguez 2003) and in the inspiration Chicano *movimiento* artists and activists drew from Black Arts and Black Power figures. (Hernandez 2002; Johnson 2002; McCarthy 2004).

Contemporary Chicano and Latino youth carry on those syncretic traditions, adapting them in creative ways to suit the sensibilities of the hip-hop generation. As a result of these shared spheres of cultural influence, Chicanos have emerged as some of

the most ardent consumers and producers of hip-hop, evidenced by growing numbers of media outlets focused on cultivating Mexican-American audiences and Latino musical talent through hip-hop-based "urban Latin" music programming (Cobo 2006; Cobo 2007; Downey 2005; Kun 2004; Kun 2006). In radio, this trend manifests in a new format known as "hurban" (an awkward condensation of the terms "Hispanic" and "urban"). Indeed, some of the most innovative developments in "urban" music since the turn of the millennium have been Latino-authored: reggaeton, a rap subgenre developed in Puerto Rico blending Jamaican dancehall, American hip-hop, and Puerto Rican salsa, is delivered in Spanish and popular across Latino national-origin groups, including Chicanos (Rivera 2009); and "urban regional" music, a bilingual fusion of hip-hop with the Mexican-regional sounds of banda and norteño, is particularly popular in the West and Southwest (Kun 2004). Furthermore, among marketing and advertising professionals, Latino youths are considered the "hottest" and fastest-growing segment of consumers in the United States. According to industry metrics, Latino teens represent over $300 billion in purchasing power and spend an average of four percent more per month than non-Hispanic teens ("Latino Entertainment and Lifestyle…" 2003). This population has generated enough interest among marketers as to warrant a demographic catchphrase, "New Generation Latino" or "NGL."[63]

Although greater media visibility for Latinos does not necessarily translate to full enfranchisement or equality, it does signify the arrival of political and consumer force to be reckoned with. Beyond merely claiming "consumer citizenship" (Banet-Weiser 2007; Dávila 2001; Dávila 2008), however, hip-hop-generation Latinos have begun flexing

[63] Source: the New Generation Latino Consortium, http://nglc.wordpress.com/about-us/

their muscle in the civic sphere, as evidenced by an upsurge in political activism among young Mexican Americans, who rallied across the country in massive numbers during the 2006 "May Day" protests against H.R. 4437, a piece of legislation proposed by the U.S. House of Representatives that aimed to make illegal immigration a felony and impose stiff penalties on people who knowingly hire or harbor non-citizens; it also proposed the building of massive new walls along the U.S.-Mexico border. Not coincidentally, the 2006 demonstrations in San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose were among the largest in the nation. Those same coalitions of young people continue to rally annually to commemorate May Day 2006 and push immigrants' rights forward. All of which is to say, the cultural and political practices of Chicano young adults in the Bay Area and more broadly across the nation require more scholarly attention, since they will significantly influence the social landscape of the future.

Focusing on the complex, layered identities of Latino "heads" provides a useful lens through which to understand the dynamic, oftentimes surprising ways race matters within the hip-hop formation. The extensive participation of Latinos in hip-hop culture bespeaks the fact that hip-hop can no longer be understood (if it ever could) as just "a black thing"—demographically but also creatively. At the same time, I argue that the experiences of Latinos in hip-hop cannot be understood in ethnic isolation but, rather, must be framed relationally, in terms of Latinos' engagements with African Americans and black cultural forms. I take this notion of "relational" cultural analysis from Luis Alvarez's essay on Chicano youth subcultures, which begins from a key historical premise:

> There was a demographic explosion in the 1930s and 1940s of Mexican, Latina/o, Filipina/o, Japanese, and African American communities in metropolitan areas as a result of the wartime economic boom and related Great Migration, immigration from Asia, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, and the growth of first-generation U.S.-born children. One important by-product was close-knit spatial relations among diverse populations in cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, Chicago, and New York. Sharing residential areas, frequenting the same night spots, and, in some places, attending integrated high schools led to a myriad of contacts among urbanites of color. Although geographic proximity did not always lead to social interaction, many young people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds did socialize, share fashion, and create musical styles together. One result was that Chicano youth, as well as their Asian American and African American counterparts, constructed identities that were relational or, in other words, at least partially based upon their interactions with other racialized youth and constitutive of their multi-valent cultural world. (2007:57)

Such interactions remain the norm in the areas where I conducted fieldwork, and have in fact intensified due to new influxes of Latino immigrants into historically African-American enclaves. Accordingly, in the following two chapters I examine the ways in which Latinos simultaneously assert their own distinctive ethnic identity through participation in the hip-hop arts and rap-music fandom while at the same time recognizing commonality and building community—however tenuous—with other racial and ethnic groups, particularly African Americans. A primary line of inquiry I explore revolves around the possibilities and challenges of forging cross-racial connections using a popular form often equated with essentialized blackness. I focus especially on the bicultural realities of Chicanos, who comprise the majority of urban Latino youth in the Bay Area. I emphasize how they are at once extraordinarily adept at “code switching” between English and Spanish languages and Mexican and American traditions, but also how they are enormously creative cultural hybridizers, generating novel hip-hop fusions that blend Spanglish with Black English and urban street slang. I argue that, through their engagement with hip-hop, Bay Area Mexican-American youth are producing new urban

imaginaries in which Chicano lowriders ride alongside African Americans in their Oakland "scraper" cars; in which Mexican muralist traditions meld with graffiti street art; in which hip-hop breakbeats accompany boisterous banda music; in which Brown Berets march beside Black Panthers and *vatos* mingle with "macks."

Hispanics Getting Hyphy: The Case of Thizz Latin

As stated previously, Latinos rarely receive enough credit for all they have brought historically to the rap game, locally and nationally. After all, it was in large part Puerto Ricans who authored those b-boy breakdance moves in the Bronx. And what would Cali hip-hop be without the laid-back style of Chicano cholos and their "low lows" (lowriders)? While the role played by East Coast Latinos of Caribbean descent in hip-hop has been fairly well documented in both the academic and popular press, a growing number of scholarly works have begun to recuperate the specific role of Mexican Americans (Delgado 1998; McFarland 2002; McFarland 2006; Perez-Torres 2006; Rodriguez 2003). All of such articles focus primarily on Southern California—namely, Greater Los Angeles, the city with the second-largest population of Mexicans in the world (after Mexico City). With a Latino listenership much larger than that of the Bay Area, Southern California has produced the majority of the most widely recognized Chicano rappers, including originators Kid Frost, Delinquent Habits, Lighter Shade of Brown, Proper Dos, A.L.T., Brownside, and Psycho Realm, and members of Cypress Hill, as well as newer notables Lil' Rob, Jae-P, 2Mex, Tolteka, Mr. Shadow, Knightowl, Dyablo, Slush the Villain, and Down a.k.a. Kilo.

Unlike Southern California, the Bay Area can claim few Chicano-rap regional crossover acts of note other than the Funky Aztecs, who most famously collaborated with Tupac Shakur on a hip-hop reworking of War's lowrider anthem, "Slipping into Darkness," and Norteño gangster rappers Darkroom Familia. But it is not for lack of trying. An extremely active network of Latino artists does exist, grounded particularly in the barrios of San Francisco's Mission District and Oakland's Fruitvale, the Hispanic-majority city of San Jose, as well as blue-collar towns and suburbs spread throughout the Bay and the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys.

When I began my field research, I had in the back of my mind the idea that I wanted to feature Latinos prominently, and a vague awareness of that such a diffuse community existed in the Bay Area, given the large population of Latinos there and the prolific nature of the regional hip-hop scene. But I had little knowledge of specific artists who I might approach. My first major "lead" in tapping into this community was a stack of fliers promoting album releases and nightlife events organized by a group called Black N Brown Entertainment. The phrase "black and brown" suggested to me the existence of the kind of ethnoracial commingling I was particularly interested in—a manifestation of what Ethnic Studies scholar Luis Alvarez (2007) describes as the "relational" processes of co-authorship occurring with increasing frequency in contemporary hip-hop, especially in diverse places like the Bay Area. Interestingly, I found those fliers in a tiny hip-hop 'fits (outfits/clothing), kicks (shoes), and gear (accessories and music paraphernalia) shop called Drum Machine in my hometown of Santa Rosa, located in the predominately white Sonoma County "wine country" fifty miles north of San Francisco.

Santa Rosa and other Bay Area commuter towns would continue to figure prominently in the twists and turns my research would take. It is emblematic of a social trend affecting the hip-hop nation that I characterize as the "'hoodification of the suburbs." This refers not simply to hip-hop's dissemination from black inner cities to white bedroom communities but to the fact that the demographics of suburbs themselves are changing dramatically. A direct effect of rampant gentrification occurring in metropolitan cores of deindustrialized U.S. cities, "'hoodification of the suburbs" denotes to the out-migration of working-class minorities from cities, where sufficient manufacturing jobs and affordable housing no longer exist to sustain them. Large segments of this embattled blue-collar labor force are now settling in formerly lily-white bedroom communities or "edge cities" made affordable in part by decreased property values resulting from the reverse "white flight" of a hip new bourgeoisie fleeing the supposedly stultifying suburbs. Instead, privileged young whites are flocking to putatively more "authentic" urban enclaves. The problem is they drive housing costs up where they land. No Bay Area neighborhood better exemplifies the "reverse white flight" dynamics than San Francisco's Mission District, a historically Hispanic neighborhood and Chicano Arts hotbed quickly being colonized by hipsters, trendy restaurants, and high-end boutiques.[64]

Just as the Mission District exemplifies the reverse white-flight phenomenon, Santa Rosa offers a case in point of suburban 'hoodification. When I graduated from high

[64] In *Hollow City* (2001), Bay Area cultural critic Rebecca Solnit offers a scathing, if flawed, critique of gentrification in the Mission and San Francisco more generally—one that bemoans the loss of artists and bohemians from formerly affordable enclaves without acknowledging those very groups' role in furthering such processes.

school in 1993, Santa Rosa already had a sizeable Latino population made up of about equal parts of middle-class Chicanos and Chicanas like my mother and migrant workers from Mexico seeking seasonal work in the vineyards. Among African Americans, however, the North Bay city sadly had the reputation as a “hella country” cow town with an off-putting contingent of “hicks” who harbored anti-black sentiments. Over the past decade and a half, however, that perception has steadily eroded as more and more African Americans (as well as African immigrants from Ethiopia and Eritrea) migrate there, seeking the Eisenhower-era “American dream”: white picket fences, two cats in the yard, or, at the very least, an atmosphere free of whirring bullets. This growing racial diversity, paired with the ubiquitous popularity of hip-hop culture among American youth, makes shops like Drum Machine increasingly viable on small-town Main Streets.

Apparently the music entrepreneurs of the Black N Brown Entertainment were savvy to the shifting geo-cultural dynamics of the hip-hop nation, since they bothered to do guerilla marketing in Santa Rosa’s cow-town downtown. Two of the fliers I picked up advertised album releases, and featured photos of African-American and Latino rappers sharing the frame, “mean mugging” (i.e. a scowling, gazing confrontationally) for the camera. There were tell-tale signs these MCs aligned themselves with the Bay Area’s “hyphy movement” and the legacy of the late rapper Mac Dre. All the fliers had the word “thizz” emblazoned on them in bold print—“thizz” being Bay Area slang originated by Mac Dre for the synthetic drug ecstasy or just an ecstatic, ludic, riotous state. Several figures in the photos flashed a hand signal resembling a referee’s “time out.” I, like many outsiders, initially mistook this for a gang sign, given the generally thuggy, gangster-rap look of the group; as was I unaware their facial expressions might not signify menace but

rather “thizz face” mischief and mayhem. I later found out their hands formed a “t” in allegiance to the “thizz nation,” a phrase that’s basically synonymous with the hyphy movement.

It turned out all were ventures of the Thizz Latin record label, an imprint of Mac Dre's Thizz Entertainment group. At the time I picked up those fliers in 2006, Thizz Latin was less than a year old, and represented the merger of Thizz Entertainment with the Black N Brown independent music group founded by Julio “Gold Toes” Sanchez, a Chicano MC and hip-hop impresario hell-bent on highlighting the diversity of the hyphy movement. A close associate of Mac Dre and Thizz Entertainment CEO Kilo Curt, Sanchez aims to dispel the notion that the hyphy movement, and Bay Area hip-hop more generally, is solely a “black thing.” To the Mission District native, who grew up traversing contiguous black, Latino, white, and Asian turfs in San Francisco’s Bayview, Excelsior, Diamond Heights, and Visitacion Valley neighborhoods, respectively, the city is practically synonymous with diversity. “I'm a San Franciscan to the heart,” Sanchez enthusiastically opined to me during our first meeting. “I'm a melting pot within my mind and in my soul.”

For our interview, Sanchez suggested we have lunch in the Mission District at a Peruvian restaurant called Rincon Peruano—a family-run hole-in-the-wall joint at some remove from the hipster-gentrification nexus of Valencia Street. I had never heard of the place, despite having lived in the Mission for four years during the late-1990s dotcom heyday. Sanchez, however, had lived there most of his life, and knew the proprietors personally. In a neighborhood where hundreds of Mexican restaurants cover the culinary landscape, Sanchez’s choice of Rincon Peruano signified the existence of a pan-Latin

identity—his as well as his neighborhood's, whose Mexican-dominant population and vibrant Chicano-arts tradition often overshadow the rich cultural contributions of other Latin-American national-origin groups. It was indicative to me of the ways in which Chicano-ness or *Chicanismo* is intermittently important to my interlocutors, who only occasionally emphasize being Mexican American as more significant than other social ascriptions such as Latino or just plain American. All this suggests the emergence of a distinctive post-nationalist identity among hip-hop generation Chicanos, particularly aspiring entertainers, who typically favor the more diffuse identity marker of Latino because A) they view it as potentially more useful in marketing themselves because it suggests a larger consumer base who can relate to them (Dávila 2001:16) and B) it simply better reflects their lived experience in ethnically mixed enclaves.

As for "Gold Toes" Sanchez and I, our South American feast was not to be. On that hot Mission afternoon, I arrived to find the restaurant closed. Soon after, Sanchez rolled up in his cream-colored Cadillac, trunk beats blazing. As he lowered his tinted window and invited me to jump in, he suggested—again, rather surprisingly, given the surfeit of Mexican eateries nearby—that we head up to a Chinese restaurant in Diamond Heights, a neighborhood where he also spent some growing-up years. Offering further proof of Sanchez's "melting pot heart and soul," when we walked in to the restaurant, the Asian immigrant owners greeted him by first name. To some, Sanchez could be imposing, with his brawny build, shaved head, and fiery demeanor. To the restaurant's proprietors, he's just a neighborhood kid.

As he mowed down Asian barbecue chicken wings, Sanchez related to me how he was using his community-bridging skills and street hustle to build a wide audience for his

label's pan-Latin roster of hardcore rappers, including Mr. Kee, Tito B, Freddy Chingaz, and Louie Loc, who are of Cuban, Mexican, Salvadoran, and Nicaraguan descent, respectively. Sanchez knows full well, however, that "when you talk about hyphy, you think about a lot of people that are brothers," i.e. African Americans, many of whom he counts as friends and associates from shared stomping grounds in San Francisco's Outer Mission, Fillmore, and Bayview-Hunter's Point districts. But Sanchez is on a mission to show how "us Latinos, man, we've been hyphy." As evidence, he cites the 1998 compilation album he produced, *17 Reasons*, featuring black MCs San Quinn, Messy Marv, Mac Dre, B-Legit, and a host of lesser-known Latino hardcore rappers. It was the first release on Sanchez's fledgling Black N Brown independent record label, and it eventually become an underground hit, selling over 60,000 copies. From there, Sanchez and Mac Dre's partnership grew, resulting in a series of hardcore-rap compilations focusing on Hispanic and African-American talent. By 2006, Sanchez realized he had a sizeable stable of Latino rappers needing to be developed, and so he founded Thizz Latin. In the coming years, he has plans to launch a similar venture called Thizz Asian to promote some of the Filipino rap talent he tells me is bubbling in the Bay Area.

In between sips of Tsing Tao beer. Sanchez proclaimed to me that, beyond San Francisco's Latino enclaves, Thizz Latin rappers can move any crowd, no matter what the demographics. In the African-American 'hoods of Hunter's Point, "we can have it rockin'"; among upscale Anglos on Union Street, "we can have it crackin' off the hook"; "[w]e could go to Chinatown, and they're gonna love us." A few weeks earlier, I had in fact seen one of Thizz Latin's premier artists, Chicano MC Jimmy Roses, rock the racially mixed crowd when he opened "Super Hyphy 18" at the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds

in the summer of 2007. Well after Roses' set, however, a fight broke out in the crowd that drew a dramatic response from riot-gear-equipped local police (discussed in Chapter Three). The altercation solidified the association of hyphy and the "thizz nation" with criminal and unruly behavior among local authorities and businesspeople, marking the beginning of the end for the Super Hyphy series and a serious contraction of live-performance opportunities for Thizz Latin artists.

Parallel to rap music's generally bad rap within "polite society," an undeniable stigma attached itself to the hyphy subculture during the years it flourished—roughly 2004 to 2007, because of its association with dangerous behaviors such as fighting and gunplay, "thizzing" and drug use, illegal car stunts, as well as its linkage with criminal elements. Some of these associations are warranted. Although the circumstances of Mac Dre's murder remain unsolved, it is widely known that he founded his music label, known in the late 1990s as Romp Records, with friends from the infamous Romper Room robbery gang, whose exploits were featured in season three of BET's popular *American Gangster* documentary series (George 2009). At the same time, hyphy style extended so far beyond Dre's nefarious inner circle as to capture, at least momentarily, the zeitgeist of an entire regional youth culture. Typically it amounted to nothing more than a generally mischievous attitude and a penchant for trunk-rattling beats, fluorescent-hued fashion, and raucous dancing. Nevertheless, hyphy formed what queer-theory scholar Michael Warner characterizes as a "stigmatized counterpublic"—stigmatized to the level that pretty much every black, Latino, Asian and white kid who happened to like local rap and follow street trends was perceived as somehow troubled or menacing. Warner reminds us that "[t]he discourse that constitutes [a counterpublic] is not merely a different or

alternative idiom but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness" (2002:119). He adds, "[H]ierarchy or stigma is the assumed background of practice. One enters at one's own risk" (121).

For Thizz Latin artist Jimmy Roses, the whole notion of hyphy and thizz got twisted to mean purely drug-addled or aggressive behavior when it is actually more about getting loose, mixing it up, and dropping your gangster guard a bit.

> That's what was good about what Mac Dre did with the hyphy movement. He brought the whole feel-good element...that made it easier for more ethnic backgrounds to participate. Just the whole idea of it. Hyphy, "thizz nation"—it got misconstrued. A lot of people said "oh thizz means drugs, this and that." The bottom line for thizz is it means feel good. "Thizz nation" is just like saying the "feel-good nation," you know what I'm sayin'?"

Roses characterizes the affect of "feeling good" with a pleasure-seeking, inhibition-loosening state that enables momentary liberation from the rigid "code of the streets" within which street-oriented males like himself are bound. For the so-called players, hustlers, and thugs who live by it, the code requires numerous constraints and continual acts of boundary maintenance: for example, one must maintain a cool masculine comportment at all times, earning respect among allies and cultivating fear among enemies through demonstrations of personal mastery and cold-blooded force, if necessary. The code is in some ways practical in that it provides a system for safely and successfully navigating fraught, turf-divided 'hoodspace terrain, where fierce competition over scant resources pits not only black against brown but black against black, brown against brown, neighbor against neighbor, and block against block. According to Roses, hyphy gives those brought up within such divisions a break from all that boundary work. He contends this is exactly why the hyphy movement opened up a space for African

Americans and Latinos to get together using hip-hop as a unifying platform—even though it is a cultural formation traditionally marked as black. Speaking specifically of Thizz Latin's multiracial project, Roses asserts

> We constantly strives to bring some sort of unity to the Bay Area because it's so diverse…So what we do is we make it acceptable for everybody to be who they are. Because we can all make good music. I've had a lot of people meet me and go, "man, I thought you were black," you know? And I'm like, "no, it's me." It does trip people out. Then on the same token I think it inspired a lot of people.

Implicit in Roses' desire to make "being who you are" acceptable is relaxing the fixed-identity stranglehold placed upon various ethnoracial groups around notions of authenticity. Cultural anthropologist John L. Jackson characterizes displays of racial authenticity as performances whose competencies require external validation. He invokes sociologist Erving Goffman's famous notion of social "scripts" to describe such performances (Goffman 1959), yet he emphasizes the inevitability and, indeed, the cultural generativity of racial performances that break down or fail. "The scripts we read from are never enough. Or rather, they are always too much—overly long and convoluted. They strain our actorly capacities for memorization. There are far too many pages, lines, cues, characters and stage directions to shore up a racial performance once and for all" (2005:18). Out of such failures Jackson proposes an alternative model of "racial sincerity," derived from "authenticity's excess," its "inassimilable remainder" (13); paraphrasing Ralph Ellison, he calls it the "something-elseness" of race (15). Whereas "[a]uthenticity presupposes a relation between subjects (who authenticate) and objects (dumb, mute, and inorganic) that are interpreted and analyzed from the outside, because they cannot…speak for themselves" (15), sincerity is based upon subject-subject

interaction or intersubjectivity. Within the sincerity paradigm, Jackson counters Gayatri Spivak's famous assertion: the subaltern can indeed speak, since "[q]uestions of sincerity imply social interlocutors who presume one another's humanity, interiority, and subjectivity" (15).

It is these kinds of intersubjective racial dialogues that make the hip-hop lifeworlds of Roses, Sanchez, and their Thizz Latin peers possible. While dominant hip-hop discourses seem preoccupied with strident notions of authenticity and "keeping it real," what I observed locally were numerous pockets of interracial exchange that transgressed the fixities often assumed by the cultural markers "black," "Chicano," "Latino," and even "hip-hop" itself. Sanchez, with his "melting pot mind and soul," represents the kind of relational ethnoracial identity so common in the Bay Area, as does Roses, a fifth-generation Mexican American who sheepishly admitted to me that he speaks only English fluently, not Spanish. Falling short of what some would consider an "authentic" *Mexicano* or even Chicano, he identifies in some ways as stereotypically "all-American," evinced by his suggestion we do our interview over lunch at the San Francisco meat-and-potatoes mainstay Tommy's Joynt—a place better known for celebrity sightings of the rock band Metallica than any ethnic associations. Looking every bit the hip-hop-generation Latino, Roses arrived wearing the same style of throwback sports jersey and Girbaud jeans popular among African-American young adults. During our conversation that day, he related to me how it was really his parents who identified more than he with the "cholo" and "chola" aesthetic. They spent most of their youths hanging out in the Mission during the neighborhood's lowrider cruising heyday in the 1960s and 1970s (although his mother actually hailed from in Hunter's Point, a

historically black neighborhood that over the past thirty years has begun to see its Latino population swell). Roses himself is from South San Francisco, a separate suburban municipality located at the northernmost tip of the South Bay Peninsula. Although "South City" boasts several major biotech firms and is steadily being enveloped by Silicon Valley wealth, when Roses was growing up it was a blue-collar industrial area where many minority families settled when housing prices in San Francisco proper became too steep. As Roses describes it,

> One thing about South City, it's gotta be one of the smallest, most diverse cities. It's super diverse. I mean, I went to school with Tongans, Samoans, Fijians, Filipinos, blacks, you know? Not a whole lot of Caucasians, actually. Yet, when you say, 'OK there's not a lot of Caucasians,' either you think, OK, it's completely Latin or completely black. But that was not the case. I mean, it was really mixed.

Unusually high levels of ethnic and racial diversity characterize numerous Bay Area cities and suburbs. The region is on the vanguard of broader national economic and demographic shifts that are changing widely held racialized preconceptions of what constitutes an inner city, a suburb, a barrio, and a ghetto. Most strikingly, immigrants from Latin America are increasingly settling in atypical areas: historically black low-income urban enclaves offer some of the only affordable housing for Latino families in large cities, while low-wage manufacturing and food-processing work draws new immigrants to outlying suburban, exurban, and rural areas not only in the American West but in the Midwest and Deep South (Tobar 2005). Undoubtedly de facto segregation still persists in the U.S.—in some cases with a vengeance (Massey & Denton 1993)—but it often plays out just as Jimmy Roses described it: with whites in circumscribed areas of affluence and "people of color" (i.e. everybody else) relegated to less-desirable low-

income containment zones. In the case of the Bay Area, "everybody else" (i.e. Latinos, African Americans, Asians, American Indians, and Pacific Islanders) represents well over half the population.[65]

The region's diversity is tied to numerous historical factors, the most important of which include the fact that its shipbuilding industries made it a destination for thousands of Southern blacks during World War II; at that same time the U.S. Bracero Program recruited large numbers of Mexicans laborers to work on nearby farms, canneries, and railroads. In addition to these now-established third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation Chicanos, the Latino population continues to swell as subsequent waves of Mexican and Central American immigrants arrive daily seeking service-sector work and manual-labor jobs in agriculture and construction. Finally and just as importantly, the Bay Area's location on the Pacific Rim ensures the continuing presence of longstanding Asian populations, some of whom are new immigrants, some of whom can trace their families back to the Gold Rush era.

The confluence of such factors gave rise to the types of mixed-race towns, neighborhoods, and suburbs of the kind in which Jimmy Roses grew up. His experience differs somewhat from that of his parents, who in the 1960s and 1970s looked to the Mission District barrio as a safe-haven community in a racially atomized city. "At that time it was real segregated, so you could only hang out in certain areas," Roses explains. His spatial and racial identity is more mobile and migratory, traversing city and suburb

[65] According to the 2000 United States Census Bureau, the racial makeup of the nine-county Bay Area is 46% white non-Hispanic, 23% Asian American, 1% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 7% black, 1% Native American, and 22% Hispanic (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey).

while unsettling the fixity of barrio and *movimiento* Chicanismo through his adoption of the hip-hop lifestyle and its attendant pan-ethnic ambiguity.

If anything, the factor that binds hardcore MCs like those on Thizz Latin and the street-rap "heads" who comprise their primary fan base is not race but social class. In contrast to the realm of "backpacker" hip-hop—whose largely college-going audiences value socially conscious lyricism and old-school, non-gangsta aesthetics—the thuggier street-rap terrain traveled by Roses, Sanchez, and most hyphy artists contains its own authenticating system, which is organized primarily around one's experience in "the 'hood" and "the streets." As I stated previously, the popularity of the hyphy movement served to expand what is considered acceptable conduct in the heavily codified street sphere—namely around performances of race as well gender and sexuality, since the exuberant gestures, deportments, and dance styles associated with hyphy in many ways break with conventions of hard-boiled masculine coolness. But shared class locations remain important. In order to be a legitimate artist or even a non-poseur aficionado of the hardcore rap subgenre—out of which hyphy emerged—one must maintain street credentials in the form of battle wounds, underworld associates, or at the very least a verifiable 'hood address. Clearly "street" as well as "'hood" serve as metonyms for low-income, high-crime social spaces in which few economic opportunities exist outside of involvement in informal economies—activities locals refer to in using the ambiguous phrase "hustling." Particularly for young men, involvement in the black-market drug trade is so ubiquitous it is practically a rite of passage.

In the Bay Area as well as nationally, blacks disproportionately occupy the poorest Census tracks that constitute America's "'hoods" and "ghettos," as are young

African-American men disproportionately affected by the social violence associated with such high levels of poverty. Nevertheless, in the multiracial low-income neighborhoods of Bay Area cities such as Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose, as well economically strapped blue-collar suburbs like Richmond, Hayward, and Vallejo, young people from Latino, Asian, and Pacific Island immigrant families also suffer the negative impact of U.S. state-based neoliberalism, with its two-pronged attack on the vulnerable in the form of industrial job loss and social welfare cutbacks. As a result, many of the young Latinos, Asians and Polynesians (particularly members of the region's sizeable Southeast Asian, Samoan, and Tongan communities) find themselves caught up in the same dire circumstances as local African-American youths.

Growing up among these multiethnic peers in working-class South San Francisco, Jimmy Roses became "oriented with all of that street mentality stuff. It's inflicted a lot of hardships on my family." Roses has "been through it," running the streets and even spending a little time locked up in prison, which he describes as far more segregated than the Bay Area streets. "When you go to the pen, northerners, like, Norteños and cats that are from Northern California, hang out with blacks…And then you have your whites and your Sureños together. What that does is it breeds a lot of hatred [among Latinos] when they come back out, and it just tears the streets up." Those dynamics create strained *intra*-ethnic as well as *inter*racial relations that in no way resemble a multicultural utopia (lest you thought that was what I was describing).

Part of the Thizz Latin project is to build broad audiences not only by bridging black-brown divides but also by counteracting intra-ethnic animosities through Latino street alliances. In pursuing this agenda, Roses eschews the cholo look; firstly, because he

does not identify with it as closely as his parents, who embraced barrio sartorial style as a symbol of Brown Pride; secondly, because the look is more associated today with Sureños, a Los Angeles-based mega-gang whose members more closely maintain the cholo style and *Caló* slang patterns of older generations (whereas Norteños are said to look more "Americanized" and "hip-hop"). In a nod toward post-nationalist Chicano solidarity, Roses consciously avoids overt gangster imagery in his lyrics and CD artwork, appearing on the cover of his 2006 self-titled debut looking less like a cholo and more like a bad-ass "rydah" in leather jacket, motorcycle gloves, and low-rider "loq" sunglasses. In his presentation of self, he chooses to represent more for the racially polymorphous hip-hop nation than for any pure or primordial Aztlan homeland.

> Everybody knows I ain't white, you understand what I'm saying?...I don't have to be a cholo to be a Mexican. I don't want to be part of that stereotype. There ain't nothing wrong with cholos. That's all of my bloodline. That's all of my past time. I'm proud of that heritage and that culture. But me personally, and my children and their children's children, I think that, you know, like you had your hippies and, I mean, you move on. You start to change. We don't have to rap like we're struggling in the barrio.

For later-generation, post-*movimiento* working-class Chicanos like Roses and Sanchez, notions of acculturation must be redrawn to reflect their social and geographic proximity to other groups, particularly African Americans. More so than white middle-class hegemonic norms, it is hip-hop—and the predominately black vernacular styles associated with it—that worked as key socializing agents in their lives. As a striking and, some would argue, disturbing display of the ease with many hip-hop-generation Chicanos have incorporated black idioms into their own expressive repertoires, Sanchez and numerous other Mexican-American hip-hoppers I encountered regularly use the "n-

word"—or, more specifically, the truncated Black-English pronunciation of "N-I-G-G-A"—to refer to friends and associates. Sanchez explains, "Basically, I grew up with Africanos, all brothers. My DVD says, you know, Gold Toes is a nigga, you know what I'm saying? He's a nigga from the root of his bones…" When I asked him whether it is acceptable to use the epithet in the presence of his African-American homies, he became somewhat self-conscious, straining to substantiate a controversial but, for him, extremely taken-for-granted behavior. His discomfort seemed less rooted in the issue of language-use in front of blacks—among whom he claimed it was "cool," reminding me he was one of the only Mexicans to ever work in the gang-riddled, predominately black neighborhood of Hunter's Point doing high-school violence prevention. His squeamishness centered more on a concern that he had offended me, someone who he rightly perceived as middle-class and lacking in any street credibility whatsoever. At that point in our conversion he did not even know I was Chicana; rather, he pegged me as Italian American. Essentially, I represented to him those white middle-class hegemonic norms he experienced at some remove. Stammering uncharacteristically in response to my question, Sanchez related, "You know, you know when to be—but really, that's how I talk. But I know, like, in certain areas, certain settings, I try my best to talk properly. I'm not the best at it, but I try to…really, I should do that all the time, but it's like I just, I'm just doing what we doin'."

Over and over during my research I heard Mexican Americans use the n-word as a familiar term. I also heard young African Americans bestow it like a title upon their Chicano friends. Such was the case when I interviewed the Trunk Boiz, an Oakland-based hardcore rap crew who gained internet notoriety when their video for the song

“Scraper Bike” became one of the twenty most-watched YouTube clips of 2007. Ten of the eleven-member group are African American. One, an MC from Richmond who goes by the name 2Deep, is of mixed Mexican and Pacific Island heritage. Although 2Deep was not present at the interview, his “boiz” represented for him:

> Arty Bo: He ain’t a ordinary Latino.
> Alexander the Grate: Yeah, he not though! (chuckles)
> Amanda: Is that supposing that Latinos are “ordinarily” subpar rappers, then?
> Arty Bo: No, no, no.
> Alexander the Grate: Naw, I’m just saying, like, just his demeanor.
> B-Janky: That’s a nigga.
> Alexander the Grate: His mannerisms.
> Amanda: Oh, I gotcha.
> Luv Doc: He’s black.
> Arty Bo: Yeah, he’s a brother.

This dialogue echoes hip-hop scholar Robin D.G. Kelley’s observation that n-word usages in gangsta rap are often class-based rather than exclusively racial. It is frequently employed “to describe a condition rather than skin color or culture. Above all, Nigga speaks to a collective identity shaped by class consciousness, the character of inner-city space, police repression, poverty, and the constant threat of intraracial violence. Part of NWA’s ‘Niggaz4Life,’ for instance, uses ‘Nigga’ almost as a synonym for ‘oppressed’” (1996:137). Kelley contends African-American gangsta rappers commonly use the n-word

> to distinguish urban black working-class males from the black bourgeoisie and African Americans in positions of institutional authority. Their point is simple: the experiences of young black men in the inner city are not universal to all black people, and, in fact, they recognize that some African Americans play a role in perpetuating their oppression. To be a ‘real nigga’ is to be a product of the ghetto. By linking their identity to the ‘’hood’ instead of simply skin color, gangsta rappers implicitly acknowledge the limitations of racial politics… (137).

In the inverse, I am tentatively suggesting that the Trunk Boiz' deployment of the n-word implicitly acknowledges the possibilities of post-Civil Rights, hip-hop-generation class politics, even though their use of that kind of charged language typically makes old-guard and middle-class activists uncomfortable (as evidenced by the symbolic "funeral" for the n-word organized in 2007 by the NAACP). But beyond Robin Kelley's framing of n-word usage in purely Marxian terms—as a sign of shared class interests—the Trunk Boiz insert superstructural or cultural elements into the equation when they invoke 2Deeps's "mannerisms" and "demeanor." They seem to suggest that, because of 2Deep's common social location and experiences, but also his affect and deportment, he in a sense *becomes black*. Their conversation perfectly illustrates of the fluidity and performativity of race—of the way it is culturally constructed rather than determined by birthright or phenotype.

While constructivist claims about race have become the theoretical norm in academia, cultural, ethnic, and area studies often shy away from subjects in which racial identities slide, ooze, and fragment. Youth-culture historian Luis Alvarez concurs in his disciplinary intervention in Ethnic Studies:

> As fields that have historically focused on a single group or community, one common assumption in Chicano and Ethnic Studies is that their objects of study are bounded by ethnic or racial markers. Too often, the fields have been structured in a kind of silo or vertical model of organization, with each field left to produce knowledge on a particular race or ethnic group without much consideration to how different groups engage one another. Moreover, when inter-ethnic experiences have been the focus of research, more often than not, the concentration is on the relationship between one "minority" group and a generalized "white mainstream." Such an approach can be limiting because it risks ignoring the rich history of conflict and cooperation between different racialized groups, implicitly frames race and ethnic relations within an artificial analytic binary (e.g. black-white or brown-white), overlooks whiteness as its own racialized or fractured identity, and glosses over the class, gender, sexual,

> regional, and generational differences within different racialized groups. (Alvarez 2007: 56)

Perhaps there is fear that emphasizing blurred racial boundaries will detract from the political efficacy of identity politics and the ways in which, as social anthropologist Kamela Visweswaran stresses, “races are cultural/historical formations that may also entail positive affirmations of social identity and acts of survival” (1998:74). Perhaps there is also fear that *over*emphasizing the performativity of race will lead whites to conclude they can avoid the thorny issue of skin privilege and class inequality and simply migrate to seemingly more glamorous, “cool,” or “authentic” social locations, much like the bourgeois white bohemians who move to the Mission District, enjoying its low-rent chic while displacing longtime Latino residents; it also calls to mind the specter of the saggy-pants “wigga” as the harbinger of hip-hop’s ruin. My intent is not to overstate the racial transgressions and relocations of my consultants in the Bay Area rap scene but, rather, to begin to frame hip-hop as a conjunctural, relational cultural formation—one that frequently opens up space for social actors to forge novel identities and alliances that exceed racial determinacies.

Too Brown for the Motherf**in Radio

Academia, however, is far from the most influential institution exerting defining power over conceptualizations of race and ethnicity in U.S. society. For my consultants and most young Americans, the cultural industries play as large a role if not larger than formal systems of education, law, or government in constituting racialized publics. Media and entertainment companies provide primary means for the widespread circulation of

racial imagery, ones that perpetuate troubling stereotypes but at the same offer sources of identification, pleasure, and meaning for members of various minority groups. Hip-hop in particular stands as one key arena within the cultural industries where people of color dominate—onstage, if not in executive boardrooms.[66] Since hip-hop became big business in the 1980s, a multimillion-dollar industry has developed to capitalize on it through "horizontally integrated" media spanning music, television, film, fashion, web, publishing, advertising, and marketing sectors. Access to those corporate channels proves crucial for aspiring artist-entrepreneurs who want to make a living or "eat" off of hip-hop.

This is exactly what Thizz Latin rappers aim to do. After all, as much as Gold Toes and Jimmy Roses are in favor of community uplift and interracial dialogue, they are also all about "getting money" by building as wide a listener base as possible. Mainstream success, however, proves elusive for Thizz Latin artists, who labor outside the "big four" major-label apparatus (Sony, Universal, Warner, and EMI) dominating the transnational recording industry. As a result, they have had to adopt a do-it-yourself entrepreneurial approach in which production, manufacturing, distribution, and marketing are all handled locally. They exemplify the ethos of "independent hustle" touted throughout the hip-hop nation but particularly associated with the Bay Area scene. Unlike a handful of local rap acts who have managed to "cross over" from the Bay periphery to the music-industry center—Too $hort, MC Hammer, Digital Underground, E-40, and, more recently, Mistah FAB, the Federation, and Clyde Carson, who all garnered major-

[66] Keith Negus explores the vulnerable position of African-American staffers and executives in the music industry in his essay "The Business of Rap: Between the Street and the Executive Suite" (1999).

label deals—there has never been a Bay Area Chicano-rap outfit to receive mainstream attention.

The Thizz Latin camp finds it hard to even make inroads into local commercial radio. Sanchez attributes this to the peculiar racial politics of the industry, and its incomprehension of Chicanos who embrace their Mexican heritage but at the same time trade in cultural forms conventionally coded as "black." He explained to me that, although some of Thizz Latin's artists have garnered a few spins, regular airtime in the Bay largely eludes them, despite the fact that several of the label's releases have sold more than 20,000 units. The tacit explanation given by DJs and programmers? They are not black enough for hip-hop and R&B stations and they are not Latin enough for Spanish-language formats. In Sanchez's words, "We're everywhere but the motherfucking radio!"

The entertainment industry as a whole cannot seem to wrap its brain around the biculturalism of urban Latino youth, many of whom grew up listening to traditional Latin sounds yet are utterly immersed in hip-hop. As stated previously, since the turn of the millennium, new television networks, radio stations, glossy magazines, websites, film production companies, and advertising agencies have emerged to target this large, lucrative demographic, but there is great debate in the trade literature over whether to use English or Spanish, and which musical style to emphasize: rock, hip-hop, regional Mexican, reggaeton, or salsa (Beirne 2002; Clemens 2005; Cobo 2003b; Cobo 2004). The situation mirrors the liminal, neither-here-nor-there position of U.S. Latinos, who comprise the nation's largest minority yet continually struggle for visibility within the

public sphere. Occupying the interstices of U.S. racial formation, Latinos continually "fall through the cracks" of dominant institutions and mainstream consciousness.

Thizz Latin beatmaker Ivan "Baby Boss" Martinez, a rising star at 18, typifies the bicultural sensibilities media companies are straining to comprehend. Accompanying Roses to Tommy's Joynt that day, the college freshman explained to me the kinds of musical and cultural influences he and his peers grew up with. He related that "Most of my friends, I would say, like, ninety percent of them, are sons of immigrants. Whenever we are with our families, you know, we love our culture. So we're bumpin' banda, you know, we're playing mariachi in the car on the freeway. But when we're with ourselves, with my clique, it's just hip-hop. Hip-hop and even reggaeton." Martinez's dexterity in mixing multiple genres impressed "ShoBoy" Edgar, a popular DJ on the Bay Area affiliate of Univision's fledgling "La Kalle" radio that specifically targets urban Latino youth. The reggaeton-heavy bilingual "hurban" station hired Martinez to produce a few soundtracks for station-IDs, fusing Latin rhythms with hip-hop breakbeats. Still, La Kalle seldom plays Thizz Latin tracks—ostensibly because they are in English. Even more galling to Sanchez is the lack of local hip-hop-R&B radio support, considering the Bay Area's two commercial rap stations, Clear Channel-owned 106.1 KMEL and Wild 94.9, regularly sponsor events in the Mexican-American community such as the Mission District's Carnaval; they even farm their DJs out for private quinceañera parties. Still, the stations refuse to put local Latin rap on regular rotation.

Interestingly, Thizz Latin MCs get more love in other regions, including Central California and the Southwest, where they receive top billing and play to crowds as large as 5,000. The hip-hop hotbed of Houston is especially amenable to Latin rap—so much

so that local players have begun to migrate there. Vallejo rapper Baby Bash moved to H-Town in 2000; he subsequently struck gold in record sales. San Jose's Upstairs Records, home of San Diego Chicano-rap phenom Lil Rob, also set up shop there. Even Sanchez, a diehard San Franciscan, feels the pull southward. He lived in Houston for a time while on the lam and built strong connections there with top Chicano talent Chingo Bling and South Park Mexican, who both appear on Thizz Latin releases. So does Baby Bash, who recently paired up with Sanchez on the track "Thick 'N Juicy," a seductive single on Sanchez's 2007 solo debut *The Gold Rush*.

Something of a slow jam, "Thick 'N Juicy" differs from the imprint's more hardcore hyphy output. According to Sanchez, Thizz Latin's vaguely thuggish, at times explicit brand of rap is another excuse offered by radio programmers for why they do not play it. This explanation seems valid for Wild 94, since the station caters primarily to the Latino-majority population of San Jose who, according to the station's market research, prefer high-energy club music and "pop" hip-hop, not hardcore rap. But that argument breaks down in the case of KMEL and even La Kalle, considering both play classic gangsta rap by the likes of Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg. Recalling a conversation with one Clear Channel radio programmer, Sanchez recounts, "[They] were like 'you guys always have gangbangin' rap' and all this. But Snoop Dogg, The Game, all these black guys, man, they be wackin' each other too! What's the difference?"

Airplay on Spanish radio remains out of the question as well since the entire Thizz Latin catalog is in English (with only the occasional Spanish or Spanglish linguistic flourish). Spanish radio programmers, in their attempts to cater to immigrant and working-class Latino audiences, operate by a more traditional model of ethnic

marketing in which language serves as a "proxy for race and class and [is] ultimately the core of a consumer categorization" (A. Rodriguez 1999:43). La Kalle's innovative "bilingual" approach, in which DJs code switch and a few mainstream American rap tracks intersperse into mostly Spanish-language music sets, marks a significant shift from older Hispanic marketing models. Still, La Kalle favors tried-and-true Latino hit-makers such as reggaeton superstars Daddy Yankee and Tego Calderon over unproven local upstarts like Gold Toes or Jimmy Roses. In an interview with La Kalle's Program Director, Bismark Espinoza (which I conducted while working on a story on "hurban" radio for a local newspaper), the programmer insisted that what is "hot" for his target audience (18-to-30 year-old first- and second-generation Latinos) is reggaeton and *bachata*- and *cumbia*-based uptempo pop (sometimes referred to as "crunkchata") by chart-topping East Coast *caribeños* such as Aventura, Rakim y Ken –Y, and Toby Love. His reasoning falls in line with longstanding attitudes among Latin music executives, who favor promoting salsa-based Caribbean genres because of their connotations of tropical glamour, sensuality, and romance (Arellano 2002; Howell 2002; Howell 2003). The preference for these genres, as well as the location of most major Latin music and entertainment companies in Miami, where the majority of record executives are Cuban American (as opposed to Los Angeles, where Mexican Americans might have more clout), reveals a problematic privileging of East-Coast Latinos and "tropicalist" tropes (Aparicio & Chávez-Silverman 1997) rooted in stereotypes of Latinos as "hot and spicy," passionate and sexy. This tropicalist orientation results in the erasure of Chicanos, who are by far the largest national-origin segment of the Latinos, as well as the

marginalization of Mexican regional musics, which are by far the Latin music's biggest sellers.[67]

According to Espinoza, Chicano rap tracks only make the cut when they become national hits, as with L.A. rapper Down's "Lean Like a Cholo," an English-language single that reached #34 on the Billboard Hot 100 in the summer of 2006. "This guy came out of leftfield," Espinoza explains, framing Down's success as anomalous rather than indicative of an emergent trend or a growing preference among Latino listeners. Of other Southern California Chicano rap artists, specifically bilingual "urban regional" MCs such as Akwid and Jae-P, who blend hip-hop and Mexican music, he asserts, "that has never been strong in the Bay, for whatever reason. It's strong in L.A., but out of L.A., nothing really, really strong is coming out, which is interesting to me…Down is the exception right now." As a result, Thizz Latin artists never receive much of a hearing among anyone outside of the hardcore regional-rap underground.

There are obviously racialized assumptions being made about what a real Latino is and what true hip-hop is. This rigid logic pushes Latino rappers into a broadcast borderland as migrant wanderers looking for a place to settle on the radio dial. As a result, entrepreneurial opportunities for young Latinos in the local entertainment sector remain scarce, while more lucrative but dangerous black-market economies exert a strong pull. Sanchez attests,

> I know you don't just get on the radio. I know it takes hard work. But it just frustrates a label like mine when I know I got good songs and I got people pushin' and I just don't get that extra help from the radio. I'm a small business—a Latin business at

[67] Mexican regional music sells more than Latin pop, rock, and tropical acts combined in the U.S. Industry analysts and music journalists claim that, in a given year, Mexican regional music sales account for at least half (Cobo 2003a) and as much as two-thirds (Wald 2001:1) of the U.S. Latin-music market.

> that. And you see what's going on in San Francisco. They got gang injunctions, they got all kind of negative things for us…And I'm one of the few record labels that can actually get youngsters off the street, have them trying to do something more positive with their lives. But it's hard when you got the bigger picture not really helping the little guy out.

For Sanchez, community empowerment occurs when Chicanos are able to access the means of mass production but also circulation. Although new media technologies obviously make music production and distribution easier for independent artists, transnational conglomerates like Clear Channel still serve as powerful gatekeepers, erecting roadblocks that deter the possibility of mainstream musical "crossover." Nevertheless local artists and entrepreneurs like those of Thizz Latin find small openings and forge ahead. Their ability to cross racial boundaries and cultural borders suggests the formation of new imaginaries within hip-hop, which is beginning to look less like a fenced-in nation and more like a "transfrontera" borderland.

Chapter Six

Where Brown Buffalos Roam:
Latino "Bridge Consciousness" in Conscious Rap

Like the Latino rappers of the Thizz Latin label, Latino "conscious" artists also struggle for citizenship within the hip-hop nation. They stake out slightly different terrain, however. Whereas Thizz Latin's street-oriented rappers align themselves with the hyphy movement and the African-American-dominant "hardcore" hip-hop sphere, Latino conscious MCs belong more clearly to the "backpacker" camp, in which authenticity hinges less on the centrality of black experience. This slight decentering of blackness allows Latino conscious MCs to embrace a more distinctively "brown" urban identity that draws imagery and inspiration from sources outside the African-American and Afro-Diasporic traditions typically associated with hip-hop cultural production.

For Latino backpackers, involvement in the hip-hop arts means embracing those Afro-Diasporic forms while at the same time adding specifically "Latin" cultural influences drawn from the Americas or even Mesoamerican historical memory. Rather than frame this in terms of simple appropriation, in which an outside group adopts practices from a parent culture, I posit this as an adaptive process similar to those described in the anthology *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (2001). In the book's introduction, Tony Mitchell argues hip-hop has "taken root" in numerous worldwide settings among various ethnic groups whose engagement with the culture has transformed from one of "*adoption* to an *adaptation* of U.S. musical forms and idioms" (11, emphasis added). No longer merely an act of cultural mimicry, global hip-hop is

indigenized yet syncretic, combining mainstream mass-mediated styles generated in the U.S. with local and traditional culture.

Similarly, Latino hip-hoppers adapt forms and idioms rooted largely in the African-American community, translating and transforming them in ways that reflect their own culture, history, and experiences. For U.S. Latinos, however, this process of translation occurs in much closer contact with African Americans than, say, Maori rappers in New Zealand (Mitchell 2001), whose connection to black hip-hoppers is imagined more than actual. By contrast, U.S. Latinos experience corresponding levels of economic marginalization, racial scapegoating, and political disenfranchisement with African Americans, and share convergent cultural histories. Far from outsiders to the hip-hop nation, U.S. Latinos can in fact claim co-authorial credit for the four formal "elements" or "pillars." When hip-hop emerged in the 1970s, it already inhered significant Latin influence: everything from Kool Herc's Jamaican sound systems and proto-rap reggae "toasts" (Rose 1994) to the breakdance innovations of *boriqueño* b-boy Richard "Crazy Legs" Colón (Flores 1994) to the Afro-Latin percussive "breaks" favored by club DJs (Keyes 2000:57) to the Chicano street-gang "*placas*" and barrio calligraphy that prefigured contemporary graffiti art (Hutchison 1993).

Further, Mexican Americans specifically helped invent rap music's West Coast sound in the 1980s. Hip-hop historian Brian Cross details how Chicanos such as Kid Frost and DJ/producer "Tony G" Gonzalez were at the heart of L.A.'s "electropop" nightlife scene that catered primarily to young Hispanic crowds (1993:24). It was in this scene that hardcore-rap originators Ice T and Dr. Dre first made names for themselves, and in which Chicanos and African Americans mutually developed the distinctive "G-

funk" sound that blended the computer-laced party tracks associated with R&B groups like Zapp and Cameo with Parliament-Funkadelic's dirty funk, slowing it down to suit cholos' slow-and-low car-cruising pace of life (Cross 1993:26). Cross also credits the fundamental hip-hop dance style of "locking" to Latino gangbangers in South Central L.A (19).[68] Additionally, Cross's collaborator Raegan Kelly attributes certain gangster-rap styles of dress (baggy khakis and jeans, oversized white t-shirts, Pendleton flannels buttoned at the collar; for girls, oversized gold hoop and "doorknocker" earrings) to chola/os and slang terms of endearment (such as "homeboy," "cuz" [i.e. "cousin"] and "OG" [i.e. "original gangster"]) to the *Caló* lexicon and the Pachuca/o concept of *carnalismo*. (1993:65).

All of this illustrates how Latinos' and Chicanos' prolific participation in hip-hop culture has always been carried out in direct contact with the black community, rather than in isolated ethnic enclaves or market niches. Differing somewhat from the examples in *Global Noise* (2001), Latin-rap fandom and artistry in the U.S. takes the form not of discretely indigenized practices but of relational and hybridized processes incomprehensible outside their proximity to African-American culture, much as today's barrios and inner-city ghettos can no longer be understood as divided between clear black-brown boundaries. These cultural concurrences account for, in part, the difficulty experienced by Gold Toes in convincing La Kalle radio's Latin-music industry gatekeepers that Thizz Latin's brand of hardcore hip-hop is markedly (and marketably)

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[68] "Locking" is typically referred to in the same instance as "popping," i.e. "popping and locking," although Brian Cross claims each emerged in different areas of California.

"Latin" in any way, or culturally distinct from familiar strains of gangster rap popularized by African Americans such as Snoop Dogg and 50 Cent.

Outside the realm of hardcore rap, however, Latino "backpacker" artists gain more license to represent *raza*-centric perspectives because neither blackness nor 'hood knowledge (i.e. adherence the code of the streets) serve as the sole certifiers of authenticity, value, legitimacy, or respect. One group in particular, an Oakland foursome of Mexican-American MCs known as BRWN BFLO, finds a fan base among socially and politically minded young adults (who account for no small number in the ultraliberal Bay Area) by weaving political content with pan-Latin cultural elements from the past—whether mythic, pre-Columbian, (anti-)colonial, or relatively recent—to create a hip-hop version of the revolutionary Latino; imagine Che Guevara in the freestyle cipher, Frida Kahlo bombin' the subway, or Emiliano Zapata ghostriding the whip. In order to evoke such associations, in lyrics and visual imagery the BRWN BFLOs draw from leftist history spanning the American hemisphere, but most fruitfully from the Chicano Movement—a lingering presence among local Mexican Americans, given much of the activity associated with *el movimiento* occurred in and around the region: most notably, the United Farm Workers' historic grape-boycott march from Delano to Sacramento in 1965[69]; the Ethnic Studies strikes at San Francisco State University in 1968 by Chicano college students in coalition with the Third World Liberation Front[70]; and the renaissance in street murals, silkscreen poster art, poetry, and *teatro* performance collectively referred

[69] UFW leaders Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta in fact both resided in the Northern California cities of San Jose and Stockton, respectively, for much of their lives.
[70] Third World Liberation Front was a coalition of San Francisco State University's Mexican-American student organization (El Renacimiento) with the Black Students Union, the Latin American Students

to as the Chicano Arts Movement, for which San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, and the Monterey Bay served as key hubs.[71]

In name alone, BRWN BFLO references *el movimiento* since it alludes to the celebrated semi-autobiographical work, *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972), by Chicano author and civil-rights attorney Oscar Zeta Acosta, who the BFLOs cite as a key source of inspiration.[72] While best known for his work in East Los Angeles representing high-profile *movimiento* leaders including Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez and members of the Brown Berets, Acosta in fact began his career as a Legal Aid lawyer serving low-income communities in East Oakland, where the BFLOs base much of their own creative and political work—specifically, in the historically Hispanic neighborhood of Fruitvale.

When I first encountered the BRWN BFLOs in the summer of 2006, however, it was across the Bay Bridge in another Latino enclave, the San Francisco Mission District. Furthering their imaginative connection to the Chicano Movement, the BFLOs appeared as part of an annual event commemorating the 1970 Chicano Moratorium, the watershed anti-Vietnam War demonstration in East L.A. where several activists were slain by police, thus mobilizing thousands of Mexican Americans across the country join *la causa* against state repression and violence. Every year in San Francisco, a Latino youth-

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Organization, and the Filipino-American Students Organization; similar organizing also took place at U.C. Berkeley.

[71] A number of key institutions form the Chicano Arts Movement made their home in the Bay Area: the Mexican American Liberation Art Front (MALAF) art collective in Oakland, the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF) art collective in Sacramento, Galería de la Raza in San Francisco, and literary magazines *El Grito* in Berkeley and *Pocho-Che* in San Francisco. Playwright Luis Valdez spent time with the San Francisco Mime Troupe before founding Teatro Campesino, based in the Monterey Bay. Comedy performance troupe Culture Clash also founded their group at the Galería de la Raza in the early 1980s. For more on the Chicano Arts Movement, see Hernandez (2002), Lipsitz (2001), Perez (2007), Vargas (2000), and Broyles-González (1994).

[72] The BFLOs discuss Acosta in an interview with local hip-hop journalist and radio DJ Davey D: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-5UFbJrqho&feature=player_embedded

leadership group called Huaxtec organizes a "Xicana Moratorium Day" celebration to honor that history and emphasize its continuing relevance among contemporary youth. I learned of the event through eye-catching promotional fliers distributed throughout the Mission in the preceding weeks. Produced by Taller Tupac Amaru, a collective of silkscreen poster artists whose work is ubiquitous in the Bay's sizeable community-of-color organizing scene, the fliers' colorful graphic imagery and lettering echoed the agitprop style popularized in the 1970s by Chicano artists of the Mission's Galería de la Raza as well as the art collectives known as the Mexican American Liberation Art Front (MALAF) in Oakland and Sacramento's Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF). Some of the Taller's members in fact trained with "social serigraphy" artists of the earlier Chicano Arts era.

More festival than protest, the 2006 Xicana Moratorium Day event took place in Dolores Park, the site of longstanding celebrations in the Mexican-American community, including Cinco de Mayo, Cesar Chavez Day observations, and *danza Azteca* performances.[73] Toward the bottom of the park's sloping landscape stood a temporary stage, over the front of which hung a paper banner reading "Ya Basta Levantate Raza!" (Enough! Rise up Raza!) written in graffiti-style script. This general call to action echoed the specific theme of the year's event, "Stop the Violence on the Borders and in the

[73] Dolores Park itself mirrors the kind of kaleidoscopic, dynamic, oftentimes contested social dynamics I argue are characteristic of the Bay Area: on the southern parameter of the park lies Mission Dolores, built in the 19th century by enslaved Ohlone Indians; to the east, a Jewish synagogue flanked by expensive condos and meticulously renovated Victorians; the top of the hill marks the outer boundary of the upscale predominately gay Castro district, and on the northern side sits Mission High School, a reputedly "rough" inner-city school where Carlos Santana and numerous Latino rockers and rhythm-and-bluesmen formed bands as teenagers in the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1980s and 1990s, Dolores Park became best known as a Norteño drug-dealing turf and an area for homeless encampment. After the turn of the millennium, with improvements by the Mission Economic Development Association, it became a hotspot for beer-

Streets," sloganeering that drew together concerns of both immigrant populations and low-income young urban Latinos who groups like Huaxtec attempt to serve, in part, by educating them as to their community's political history.

Throughout the afternoon, numerous political speakers appeared, primarily young adults from the community, as did musical performers within a lineup consisting mostly of local hip-hop artists. Appearing somewhere in the middle of the bill, the BRWN BFLOs took the stage wearing their Brown Pride, quite literally, on the sleeves of their khaki Ben Davis button-downs and matching baggy chinos, outfits that echoed the vaguely militant uniforms of the Brown Berets. Then a duo comprised of core MCs Big Dan and Somos 1 (a.k.a. "Eso," from the initials "S.O." for "Somos One"), they performed several songs with live backing band Entre Musicos, whose subsequent set included a repertoire of Mexican folkloric and regional music. Despite the event's crude outdoor acoustics and a somewhat chaotic assemblage of onlookers—young people congregated all around the stage, even onstage—Somos and Dan roused the crowd with a spirited delivery that included call-and-response techniques and social-movement protest chanting.

Notably, BRWN BFLO stood out as the most overtly *raza*- or Chicano-centric group in a diverse lineup of rap performers that included Argentinean-American queer multimedia artist Lady Tragik, Bay Area black-arts poet Ise Lyfe, Afro-Panamanian Oakland duo Los Rakas, East Bay Nicaranguense Deuce Eclipse, and the L.A.-based all-female hip-hop collective Cihuatl Tonali. As with the case of Thizz Latin, *Chicanismo* in

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swigging hipsters, sunbathing gay men, and seasonal gatherings such the San Francisco Mime Troupe's Fourth of July political-theater performances and the "Dykes on Bikes" rally during Pride Week.

this instance was only one of several loci of cultural affinity for the young Latinos of Huaxtec who, although they designed the event specifically to commemorate an important moment in Chicano history, tapped pan-Latin performers as well as African-American acts to co-headline the celebration. Other than being Chicano, being hip-hop, being leftist, being the children or grandchildren of immigrants, and being from struggling communities all served as points of alliance tying the crowd together.

The BRWN BFLOs appeared as mainstays at many other such political demonstrations and consciousness-raising events throughout the period I conducted fieldwork. They were among the leaders of the massive 2006 May Day mobilizations, helping guide demonstrators in Oakland during a march simultaneous to larger rallies in San Francisco and San Jose. After seeing them perform in several contexts, I finally had a chance to interview the group in March 2007. By then they had become a foursome with the addition of Peruvian-Chicano poet-MC Giant (a.k.a. "Oye") and rapper/producer Jacinto. For our meeting, the BFLOs invited me to come by an evening rehearsal at their studio, which turned out to be the living room of a small apartment rented by Jacinto's mother in an unassuming one-story triplex. Just 19 years old at the time, Jacinto is the youngest of the uncommonly multigenerational group. Somos and Giant are the elders, in their late twenties then, who met as undergrads U.C. Berkeley, while Jacinto and Dan and were just embarking on their college careers: Jacinto had recently begun studying audio production at a private technical-arts school in Emeryville, while Dan, at age 21, was preparing to transfer to U.C. Berkeley in the fall.

Although they consider themselves partners and peers, the older BFLOs occasionally played mentoring roles for the younger ones. Somos, who has worked as a

high-school teacher and counselor in various Oakland public schools, met Jacinto through a fellow educator who invited Somos to perform at the African-American History Month celebration at Jacinto's high school—another telling instance of black-brown cultural connectivities common in the Bay Area. Similarly, Somos met Dan through a colleague, Favianna Rodriguez, the co-founder of Taller Tupac Amaru and an arts educator at the shop's adjacent nonprofit, Eastside Arts Alliance. Dan had been participating in some of Eastside Arts' music-themed youth programming while he worked on, according to Somos, "putting his life back together" after several stints in juvenile jail. In an effort to help Dan reenter school, Rodriguez introduced him to Somos, who recalls "going over his transcripts and pretty much being a guidance counselor for him at first." The relationship soon expanded and became less one-sided, however: "When [Dan] found out that I rapped, he invited me in to come [to Eastside Arts] and meet with him and his friends that were trying to record an album about youth violence. So I came in, he pulled me in, and that was, like, one of my first more professional recording experiences."

For backpacker artists like BRWN BFLO, as with underground hyphy hip-hoppers, sharing resources proves a necessity, and is a key reason for the strong musical and entrepreneurial alliances evident throughout the Bay Area scene, since regional hip-hop artists receive so little mainstream commercial attention or support. For the BFLOs, resources flow both ways, from the younger to the older and vice versa. Somos and Giant bring, among other things, "social capital" (Bourdieu 1990) in the form of professional experience, systems savvy, and an empowering knowledge of Chicano and Latino history enhanced by college educations. Somos, in particular, received his bachelor's degree in Ethnic Studies from U.C. Berkeley, and regularly conducts educational workshops for

young adults on movement-building in communities of color. More than simply academic learning, however, he draws upon personal knowledge based upon family connections to the United Farm Workers. A Delano-born, self-identified "farmworker baby," Somos is the son of a Mexican immigrant mother who joined the UFW early on, when she was working in the Central California fields; she eventually became an administrator of the Robert F. Kennedy Farm Workers' Medical Plan, the first ever health plan for agricultural workers in U.S. history. While his mother accomplished all this with no college education, his father joined the movement as an idealistic middle-class Chicano college student from San Diego State University.

As with Somos, Jacinto occupies a class location somewhere between middle- and working-class, as evidenced by the expensive audio equipment his mother allowed him to set up in the living room of her modest rental apartment, located on the border of Oakland's high-crime "Ghost Town" neighborhood and the more upscale tech-industry hub of Emeryville. Alongside Jacinto's mixing board laid rows of vinyl albums, on top of which sat the gatefold of a Joni Mitchell record. Noticing me eye the album—a favorite of mine—Jacinto informed me this was his mother's collection, which he drew from to "make beats" (Schloss 2004). In fact, one of the tracks he played for me during our meeting sampled neither hip-hop nor Latin music but, rather, a recording cribbed from his mother's 1970s-era singer-songwriter collection: an almost unrecognizable refrain from Jim Croce's hit song "Time in a Bottle." "That one's for Somos' solo track," he informed me. Although this indicated to me he had been raised in a fairly "Americanized" environment, the homey smell of refried beans, being stirred by his

mother in the nearby kitchen, told me something more: this was a thoroughly bicultural household.

Whereas Jacinto brings youthful energy and a high level of technical skill to BRWN BFLO, Big Dan adds an important element of street credibility to a group whose other members have, for the most part, stayed out of trouble, avoiding the hazards common in the lives of so many young inner-city Latino men: school dropout, gang involvement, drug dealing, gun violence, etc. Dan, on the other hand, found himself "caught up in the game" at a young age, drifting in and out of detention facilities for years. What is uncommon about his story is the way he found a route out of the streets using hip-hop and community activism in combination: first, as a participant in hip-hop media-arts programming offered by youth-serving Oakland nonprofits, including West Oakland's Black Dot Arts Collective and, later, the Eastside Arts Alliance in Fruitvale. His leadership skills eventually led him to an AmeriCorps-funded position doing outreach work in Deep East Oakland at Youth UpRising, followed by employment as a peer counselor at Youth Alive!, a violence-prevention organization serving gang-involved youth that, years before, had helped Dan seek alternatives.

The son of immigrants, Dan grew up in West Oakland, a high-crime area whose once-lively commercial corridors and plentiful blue-collar jobs had withered away by the 1980s, transforming neighborhoods into scenes of blight and abandonment. At the apex of deindustrialization, when Dan was a boy, his parents managed to find menial, transitory work in the barely surviving light-industrial sector, which he details grimly:

> My parents had a sixth grade education. They came over here [from Mexico] with no documents, so they basically just got whatever they could. My pops and my moms worked at a, um—I call it a sweatshop. My dad was getting paid like five dollars

> working at this West Oakland factory that ended up getting shut down. My mom did too. She was working at a spot making instrumental cleaning utensils. And I walked in there a few times and, now that I've looked back at it…they didn't even have a place to sit. It was just a whole bunch of people just like crammed up in this little factory that just worked them. (personal communication)

Dan also grew up during the height of the "crack epidemic" in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when crack cocaine entered the black-market drug economy, causing a massive escalation in crime, violence, and addiction in poor neighborhoods throughout the U.S. Locally, West Oakland stands out as one of the areas hardest hit by the negative effects of crack and deindustrialization, factors that devastated its mostly African-American population.

In his description of his West Oakland childhood, Dan recalls "I grew up a lot around black folks in West Oakland, in the West Oakland projects. Which I don't think my mom knew what they were getting into but we were just doing our thing, you know." For large and ever-increasing numbers of Latino immigrant families, low-income African-American enclaves offer some of the only affordable places to settle in the U.S. For the first-generation children of those families, growing-up experiences include continual encounters with blackness: with black peers, with black expressive forms, with a black cultural milieu in which they comprise a minority. In describing his family as "just doing our thing," Dan refers to a household in which Spanish dominates, while the smell of Mexican food and sounds of Latin music permeate. This environment differed sharply from the streets Dan stepped out into every day—a black public sphere in which African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and rap music pervade the cultural landscape.

Although in his teens the majority of Dan's friends were African American, he had a number of Chicano "homies" as well. With them, he remembers "Whenever we did listen to any [rap] that was, like, Mexican or in Spanish, it was folks from L.A. And we was like 'Naw, we need to start our own shit.' We just never had access to it…cuz we didn't have the money or the connections." Surprisingly, Dan began his rapping career not in the company of his black or Chicano friends but with his uncle, a graffiti writer and hip-hop DJ who encouraged his nephew to freestyle rhyme over his mixes. Dan is one of several consultants I spoke to who were introduced to the hip-hop arts not by their peers but by an older relative, pointing to the fact that hip-hop—a cultural formation now more than thirty years old—can no more be reduced to any one age cohort than it can one particular race or socioeconomic group.[74]

Of Mexican Americans' involvement hip-hop, Dan asserts "I think it's really important for hip-hop to be an outlet for *raza*. And it has been. But I don't think there's been one Bay Area *raza* or Latino or Chicano rapper that I grew up listening to. So I think it's really important for that to be put out." In their attempts to put Chicano hip-hop out, Dan and the BRWN BFLOs must necessarily tread racially charged, interstitial terrain—a cultural balancing act similar to Thizz Latin's precarious predicament: being brown in a black-dominated popular art form controlled largely by white business owners. When I asked Dan why he thinks that, given the wide participation of Chicanos in hip-hop at a grassroots level, Mexican Americans rarely receive acknowledgement, he suggested anxieties over ownership and cultural provenance may play a role: "There's

[74] Although I repeatedly use the term "hip-hop generation" throughout this discussion, I use the term similarly to Bakari Kitwana (2003) and Jeff Chang (2005), as shorthand for those born after 1965, in the

been a lot of debate around what hip-hop is and who started it and who it belongs to. I don't think that's the way to approach it. I think hip-hop is universal, diverse, worldwide. I mean, it might have started out in the Bronx, you know, black folks might have, but it's open now. Hip-hop is clothes, it's the way we talk, the way we live." When I inquired whether he had ever personally received any pushback from African Americans for treading upon perceived proprietary cultural territory, he responded

> I think so far, because I freestyle and I'll rap battle any cat, and a lot of black folks know me—if anything I know more blacks than anyone else [because] that's who I grew up with—I don't think it's happened to me yet. I don't think it will. If it does, I don't think I'll shy away from it. I mean, I'm not white! I'm not rich, or I'm familiar with hip-hop.

In his claims of legitimacy, Dan invokes several separate but related ideas. The first hinges on his artistic skill: Dan's ability to rhyme in improvisatory "freestyle" and "rap battle" modes.[75] Given the high level of talent required to partake in such challenging performance contexts, successful freestyle and battle rappers receive utmost respect among MCs and hip-hop heads. Those in the backpacker camp especially hold these skills in esteem, and consider freestyling to be one of the "purest" forms of rapping since A) rap began as a freestyle form at New York dance parties, when either the DJ or "MC"—who at that point literally served a "master of ceremonies" or host of the event—chanted improvised rhymed couplets and toasts over the music, and B) freestyle rap's spontaneous nature makes it nearly impossible to commodify. In emphasizing his

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"post Civil Rights" or "post soul" (Neal 2002) era, rather than to designate one familial generation.

[75] "Freestyle" rap is an improvisatory mode of rhyming that requires the MC to concoct clever verses "off the dome," or off the top of his or her head. Whereas organized freestyle competitions known as "rap battles" typically occur in clubs or an official venue, other "freestyle" sessions emerge spontaneously in "ciphers": street-side gatherings of MCs who trade lyrical barbs and jibes while standing in a circle.

freestyle skills, Dan draws from the evaluative criteria of the backpacker camp, to which BRWN BFLO loosely belongs.

At the same time, Dan's emphatic commentary on race and his own racial location suggests the value system of 'hoodspace and hardcore hip-hop matters more to him here than backpacker standards. He emphasizes his familiarity with African Americans, where "knowing" black folks and black folks "knowing" him signify more than just passing acquaintances but, rather, a deeper level of trust and acceptance within the black community—a kind of intimate knowledge difficult to acquire unless one is, like Dan, raised within that community. What stands out most in his statement on race is his exhortation "I'm not white!" It speaks to the interstitial positioning of U.S. Latinos who, because of the hegemony of black-white, either-or racial models, must assert difference in terms of disavowal: i.e. "I may not be black, but I am *definitely not white*."

For non-African-American rappers seeking respect in the black-dominant sphere of hip-hop, asserting legitimacy often takes the form of distancing oneself from whiteness. Emphasizing experiences of economic privation aids in this process, as when Dan additionally declares "I'm not rich." Particularly in 'hoodspace, blackness inheres social capital and often becomes associated with the harsh or "hardcore" life experiences associated poverty. Hip-hop scholar Jeffrey Ogbar similarly observes this conflation of race and class in his analysis of authenticity among multiracial rappers: "At its most fundamental level, 'realness' in hip-hop implies an intimate familiarity with the urban, working-class landscapes that gave rise to hip-hop in the 1970s…Implicit in this spatial

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Sociolinguist Marcyliena discusses freestyle rap extensively in *The Real Hiphop - Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the Underground* (2009).

notion is a class consciousness that is inextricably connected to race. It implies (somewhat narrowly) that black communities are synonymous with poor communities" (2007:39). Inversely, bourgeois whiteness comes to embody all that is effete, inauthentic, corrupt, and, in a sense, abject. In hip-hop and 'hoodspace discourses, interlocutors literally "flip the script" on Eurocentric racial supremacy.

Finally, Dan ends his statement with the assertion "I'm familiar with hip-hop," which I take to have ambiguous meaning; it can be read more or less racially. On the one hand, he claims to be no dilettante, but rather to have the kind of knowledge that backpackers elevate—a value system in which authenticity is tied less to racial identity than to a comprehension of hip-hop's formal elements: its Bronx origin story, its "old school" traditions, its "four pillars," etc. On the other hand, being "familiar" with hip-hop for Dan also connotes having 'hood credentials, or a personal connection to the kinds of low-income African-American communities traditionally considered wellsprings of grassroots hip-hop culture.

In his ability to negotiate black and Latino spheres, to meld "street" and "conscious" rap idioms, and to speak to both middle-class backpackers and hyphy kids from the 'hood, Big Dan is a mediating figure. More than any other member of the BFLOs, he embodies the "bridge consciousness" that Jose David Saldívar invokes, as an extension of Gloria Anzaldua and Cherríe Moraga's famous metaphor for mestizaje in *This Bridge Called My Back*" (1983). According to Saldívar, it is "a consciousness that allows [Chicanos] to explore and exploit their double vision as both participant and observer and as displaced subjects across multiple discourses" (1997:109).

At the level of social class, Dan is unusual in is his ability to find routes out of a harsh growing-up environment during a time in history in which so many paths toward social mobility are closed off. Although Dan stands out among his peers in his ability to straddle dual class locations—moving between 'hoodspace and campus life—what he does share with his bandmates and other hip-hop-generation Latinos is a bicultural orientation, one that Gloria Anzaldua argues is typical within "borderland" spaces: "[T]he Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (1987:Preface). Jose Saldívar provides a similar description of hybrid cultural experiences within the "transfrontera contact zone," which he describes as the "social space of subaltern encounters, the Janus-faced border line in which peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves now negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics… '*Transfrontera* contact zone' is an attempt to invoke the heterotopic forms of everyday life whose trajectories cross over and interact" (1997:13, emphasis in original). This bifurcated reality rings especially true for the children of immigrants such as Big Dan and Thizz Latin's Ivan "Baby Boss" Martinez, who are both fluent in Spanish and English and grew up immersed in both Mexican cultural forms and American popular arts, including hip-hop. In contrast to English-dominant third- and fifth-generationers Gold Toes and Jimmy Roses, whose rap style is often difficult to distinguish from their African-American Thizz Nation colleagues', the BRWN BFLOs weave bilingual dialogue and explicitly Mexican references much more extensively into their rap songs.

Ironically, even though the BRWN BFLOs profess to make music mostly "for the love" of hip-hop and *la gente*, their brand of *raza*-centric rap may have more commercial potential than the unabashedly entrepreneurial efforts of Thizz Latin. For marketers tasked with targeting "New Generation Latino" audiences, urban music containing overtly "Latin" cultural markers (such as Spanish lyrics or *clave* rhythms) holds the greatest appeal—hence La Kalle radio's emphasis on reggaeton and "crunkchata" artists. Toward this effort, La Kalle's embrace of Chicano rap has been marginal at best. Nevertheless, Big Dan managed to make significant inroads at the station—more so than Gold Toes or Jimmy Roses. In 2007, Dan won the station's on-air freestyle-rap championship, which secured him an opening spot later that year at the large-scale "La Kalle Explosion" concert in San Jose featuring reggaeton superstars Don Omar, Wisin y Yandel, Hector "El Father," and Toby Love. La Kalle also occasionally books Dan to appear at other promotional events throughout the Bay Area.

Seeking further airtime, Dan informs me he is compiling some "commercial hip-hop club bangers and jingles for the radio station." But these efforts at mainstream crossover come with misgivings for the activist rapper. "I'm having a lot of challenges within myself as far as satisfying that audience but staying me. I feel a whole lot of pressure to say stuff about what I don't have, or talk about the fantasy life… But I think that's only gonna develop me into a better MC, being able to expand and reach out to different folks." For most conscious MCs seeking inroads into the music industry, commerciality comes with a sense compromise since current popular rap emphasizes subject matter anathema to backpacker ideals: namely, hypermasculine displays of personal power through consumer excess (luxury cars, diamond jewelry, designer

fashion, and otherwise extravagant lifestyles) and sexual braggadocio, in which women also become objects to be acquired, used, and discarded (hooks 1994; Morgan 2000; Pough 2004; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Wallace 1995). While Big Dan finds these aspects of contemporary rap objectionable, he acknowledges the need "to make the crowd dance" by keeping the beats heavy and the content light. In order to do this—and to "reach out to different folks" across the backpacker and hardcore spectrum—he negotiates gender politics with a level of tact and sensitivity similar to what he brings to his racial and class transversals: "It's just about putting it down and, you know, not saying too much. Acknowledging the beautiful woman in the crowd in a way where it's not disrespecting them. I don't think that's bad at all. You know, I'm acknowledging beauty, the way they dance, the way the men get down on the floor. So just, you know, kinda acknowledging that, being funny about it, and that's about it."

The pressure Dan and other MCs feel to pander to heteronormative, at times overtly misogynist standards set in mainstream rap, reggaeton, and Latin pop music would be less pointed if industry gatekeepers put more development dollars behind female recording artists. Inevitably, though, as music genres evolve and niche markets expand, so too will the role of women MCs, who can provide counternarratives to the "hoochie mama" and "video vixen" fabulations of black and Latina sexuality pervading contemporary urban music.[76] Locally, several Latina MCs have begun to emerge, voicing multivalent, "multi-axial" (Collins 1990) feminist perspectives: Lady Tragik, an openly gay backpacker MC, photographer, and graphic artist, teaches hip-hop arts workshops for

[76] Among the few female performers who have made inroads into the reggaeton and Latin-rap industry include Ivy Queen, Nina Sky, Mala Rodriguez, La Bruja, Flakiss, and LaLa.

teens and performs at a bimonthly lesbian dance party in San Francisco called "Cockblock"; Mistreat, a Mexican-American teen MC featured prominently in the documentary "Grind and Glory" (2008), who raps in the "hardcore" idiom about growing up around gangs and violence in the Mission; and La Patriota, a Chicana political rapper and poet hailing from the burgeoning Latin hip-hop scene in San Jose. Given the popularity of hip-hop across the axes of race, class, gender, and even sexuality,[77] one can assume many other young Latina rappers, DJs, b-girls, and graffiti artists are out there, readying themselves for a "come up" by building their artistic chops in the public and private spaces where girls gather: rec centers, parks, bedrooms, and backyards across the Bay.[78] Their emergence marks an important starting point for future scholarship.

Bridges Above Walls: The HOMEY Mural

Latinas, and women generally, contribute to Bay Area hip-hop in other forms beside participation in the traditional "four pillars." I want to conclude this discussion of Latinos in local hip-hop by opening it up to include the many educators and mentors working for youth-leadership organizations in the Bay Area. Their positive presence looms large in a region where so many youth-serving nonprofits and social-service agencies use expressive culture—hip-hop culture, specifically—to attract and retain

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[77] The Bay Area is, perhaps unsurprisingly, home to members of the Deepdickollective (D/DC), a pioneering group in the gay hip-hop or "homo hop" movement.

[78] The issue of space is particularly pertinent in talking about girls and their engagements with popular culture, because social spaces for girls often differ from those of boys—particularly the "lads" whose street-dwelling practices provide much of the focus in classic subculture studies by Dick Hebdige (1991) and Paul Willis (1977). Angela McRobbie emphasizes the private spaces of bedrooms over the public sphere of the street as a key site where girlhood is produced (2000) through magazine reading, telephone talking, and socializing with friends. Marie "Keta" Miranda focuses on public parks and recreation centers

young adults: people like Favianna Rodriguez of Eastside Arts Alliance, Marlene Sanchez of the Center for Young Women's Development, and Chicana social-justice activist Nancy Hernandez.

At just 29, Hernandez is already veteran community organizer, having worked on the 2006 May Day walkouts as well as the efforts against Prop. 21 (the highly punitive "Juvenile Justice Initiative") in 2000 and, back when she was just 15 years old, the campaign to defeat Prop. 187, the 1994 initiative designed to prohibit immigrants' access to social services, healthcare, and public education. In 2007, Hernandez served as project coordinator for a publicly commissioned street mural created by members of HOMEY ("Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth"), a neighborhood-based violence-prevention nonprofit in San Francisco serving low-income Latino young adults—primarily immigrant, first-, and second-generation teenagers of Mexican and Central American heritage. Through art, education, and skill-building activities, the organization offers alternatives to young people growing up in a rough environment in which gangbanging, drug dealing, gun violence, and incarceration are the norm.

I interviewed Hernandez during the fall of that year, shortly after the completion of the mural, for an article I was writing on HOMEY for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*. This was not the first time I had met the intrepid community leader, however. In 2006, while doing initial dissertation research, I attended a workshop Hernandez facilitated on political organizing among multiracial youth populations. The session was part of a larger youth summit for teens from low-income communities of color (as well as

in her ethnographic study of Chicana girl gang members in Oakland (2003). Kyra Gaunt locates the young women of her study, *The Games Black Girls Play* (2006), mostly in schoolyards and sidewalks.

adult allies working within those communities). Fittingly, the summit took place on the San Francisco State University campus, the site of the historic pan-ethnic student actions of the Third World Liberation Front in 1968. On that foggy San Francisco day, on the suburban outskirts of the city, far removed from the 'hoods of the Mission, Bayview, Fillmore, and Oakland, Hernandez was able to attract a crowd of young adults from those targeted areas, who had trekked far and wide to attend. And she kept their attention by making connections between hip-hop culture and the revolutionary groups from the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically, as a way of demonstrating the shared interests and overlapping histories of black and brown communities, she organized her entire presentation around the similarities between the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican nationalist group from the same era.

To begin the discussion, Hernandez provided attendees with copies of both organizations' founding documents: the Panthers' Ten-Point Plan and the Young Lords' 13-Point Program and Platform. The young people in the room responded enthusiastically to both manifestos, which each emphasize the need for self determination—something session participants agreed was lacking in their communities too. One young African-American woman commented on her community's lack of representation in government and public service: "We don't want some rich lady from Piedmont[79] telling us what to do. I want my cousin Pookie to come out and help me." Another Latino teen remarked upon Eurocentric bias his education: "How many times can you learn about Christopher

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[79] An affluent, mostly white municipality located right in the middle of Oakland, Piedmont was one of the "25 Top-Earning Towns" in *CNN Money Magazine*'s list of "The Best Places to Live" in 2007, and was also named the "Best Place to Live" in the United States in 2007 by *Forbes*. In the 1920s, Piedmont was known as the "City of Millionaires" because it had the most resident millionaires per square mile of any city in the U.S. (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piedmont,_CA)

Columbus coming and raping and stealing land. It's old. Time to change the story." Hernandez then asked participants to compare 1960s radicals and politically outspoken gangster rappers such as Tupac Shakur and Ice Cube, soliciting definitions of the terms "thug" and "revolutionary" to examine where they overlapped and differed. She concluded with a close-listening exercise in which participants noted their favorite lyrics from a recording by the conscious hip-hop crew Rebel Diaz. The two lines young people favored most were "Use the culture as a weapon" and "If hip-hop organized, the whole world would be in trouble."

In combination, these activities reflect a form of transformational praxis employed by Hernandez and other young social-justice activists throughout the Bay, who regard hip-hop as an asset for community organizing rather a detriment—as a stylistically, affectively, and discursively unifying force rather than a distracting, corrupting, or insufficiently Marxian presence. Continually throughout my research, I heard street-savvy youth advocates use the phrase "meet young people where they're at" as shorthand for a nontraditional approach to outreach directed at "high-impact" or "at risk" young populations—one that, in order to make community work relevant for kids from the 'hood, harnesses forms of popular music and indigenous street culture (particularly hyphy) viewed by most adult outsiders with suspicion or outright derision.

Hernandez employed this same strategy in coordinating the HOMEY mural. Like most of the young people she mentors, Hernandez has no formal background in art but rather, by her own account, "grew up lookin' at hella murals and kicking it with people who were spray-painting and stuff" in her hometown of Pittsburg, a racially diverse working-class East Bay suburb. Later, her activist work connected her with a number of

prominent hip-hoppers, including Big Dan, Somos 1, Lady Tragik, and Spie, an aerosol artist from Oakland's famed TDK crew who Hernandez recruited to help on the HOMEY project; although he is Asian American, Spie has extensive experience working in the *muralista* tradition. (Latorre 2008:133). Together, the entire group came up with a vivid design that melds urban motifs and celebrates the hybridized *rasquache* realities of HOMEY members: lowriders ride alongside "scrapers," Pachucos and Mac Dre mingle, and "wild style" lettering makes the same statement as agitprop silkscreen posters from the 1970s. Next to the Pachuco stands Frida Kahlo in a zoot suit; her androgynous appearance references a famous photograph of Kahlo in drag, and suggests a more expansive attitude about sexuality than is typical in hip-hop circles outside the Bay Area.[80]

Entitled "Breakin' Down Barriers: Building Bridges of Solidarity," the mural takes unity as a starting point—a theme its young artists arrived upon after several brainstorming sessions. In these initial discussions, Hernandez recalls, participants reflected upon the influences that divide people, communities, and cultures—everything from national boundaries to gang-affiliated colors. The U.S.-Mexico border wall figures prominently, twisting through the mural's central panels to suggest an Anzalduan "borderland" scene. The wall is juxtaposed with portrayals of intra-ethnic alliance and intergenerational continuity in the foreground: Mexican *revolucionarios*, United Farm Workers, and Brown Berets, painted in sepia tones, float beneficently behind HOMEY and Huaxtec May Day protesters donning oversized white tees and white bandanas—a

[80] In our conversation about the mural, Hernandez informed me that the photo of Kahlo in a men's three-piece suit was, in fact, inspiration for the young artist who painted the "Frida Pachuca."

purposefully neutral color worn nationwide by Latino youth during the May 1st immigrant-rights rallies in 2006.

As another manifestation of the mural's "solidarity" theme, no national flags appear in the entire 100-foot long painting. Unlike the many old-school Mexican flag-emblazoned murals in the neighborhood, the HOMEY piece expresses its anti-imperialist Brown Pride through pan-Latin, pan-indigenous, post-nationalist themes. According to Hernandez, "Flags and borders are things that don't so much represent nations or groups of people or tribes, but maybe more identify lines that have been drawn by Spaniards or by politicians. So we didn't portray any of that." On colonialism, Hernandez claims HOMEY members make immediate connections with their own precarious position as residents of a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood: "Right now, a lot of people feel like natives [facing] settlers right here in the Mission." She chuckles, though, as she explains to me the more practical reason for avoiding national flags: "Because if you portray one of them you've got to portray all of them, and there's, like, so many [national origins] around here." When I queried her specifically about HOMEY members' heritages, Hernandez emphasizes "We have a lot of Salvadorians, Guatemalans, Hondureños, and Yucatecos. There are a lot of Yucatecos in this city—a lot of Mayans."

Again, as is the case with Thizz Latin and Xicana Moratorium Day, cultivating a broadly articulated pan-Latin or "Latino" cultural identity makes more sense than any nationalist assertion of Chicanismo in movement-building cultural projects like this, whose purpose is to create collectivity out of a diverse assemblage of individuals. In the mural, emphasis upon shared Latin American histories of indigeneity, colonial oppression, and revolutionary uprising serves as a unifying theme: in addition to Mexican

and Chicano dissidents, the painting features Nicaraguan rebel leader Augusto Sandino in the background, while Mesoamerican feathered serpent gods snake through the piece, representing spiritual elements common in both Mexican and Central American symbology.

Representing present-day realities, hyphy motifs throughout the mural suggest subcultural commonalities among hip-hop generation Latinos and draw non-Latino ethnoracial groups—particularly African Americans—into the picture (quite literally). In addition to brown-skinned May Day protesters masked in white bandannas, the mural portrays young white-tee-wearing black men and women leaning against a neon-green scraper, kicking it with their *raza* friends. Nearby, a modern-day Watsonville Brown Beret gives Fred Hampton, Jr. a "soul brother" handshake; both figures represent factions of Civil Rights-era groups still active in Bay Area progressive circles. Evoking further connection to a revolutionary past, Black Panthers Assata Shakur and Huey Newton hover in the background, painted in the grayscale tones of an archival photograph—much like the sepia-toned Brown Berets—to suggest they are "from a different era, kind of larger than life but influencing what's going on today," according to Hernandez.

Whereas black and Chicano nationalism once provided useful parameters for the various kinds of political and cultural work engaged in by young radicals in the 1960s and 1970s, hip-hop generation activists are using lessons learned from those movements to create post-nationalist, more racially expansive forms of solidarity that nonetheless accommodate multiple and distinctive ethnic identities. The HOMEY mural is an expression of such emergences. As Hernandez attests, "This is people's art, and people's art needs to represent where the people are at and where the people want to go." In a

sense, it is a work of urban futurism: as much as the mural references past influences and present-day realities, it points to a future in which race matters, but it matters in ways that allow for the formation of new publics constituted along shared affective lines or additional social axes (class, gender, sexuality, generation, etc.). Whether such multiracial publics are formed in the 'hood out of economic necessity, or through imaginative acts of identification facilitated by media circulation, hip-hop culture offers a key point of convergence, as the experiences of Hernandez, HOMEY, Huaxtec, BRWN BFLO, and Thizz Latin attest.

Chapter Seven

Reaching the "Crack Baby Generation"

I began conceptualizing the topic that would eventually become my dissertation during the years I worked fulltime as a music journalist in the Bay Area (1997 to 2001), a period in which the local hip-hop scene became more politicized than it had ever been, as "conscious" hip-hoppers joined grassroots young activists to contest the structural inequalities plaguing their generation: pervasive unemployment, decaying public schools, emaciated social service programs, reentrenched racial segregation, and increased youth criminalization. During those years I watched with enthusiasm as what seemed to be a budding social movement creatively fused direct action with urban expressive culture to galvanize young people in a struggle for racial equality, educational access, and juvenile-justice reform.

This was during the dot-com boom, centered largely in San Francisco and the nearby Silicon Valley. Because of this tech-driven economic boom, the disparity between rich and poor in the Bay reached unprecedented levels, resulting in an intensification of class and race antagonisms. Urban theorist Mike Davis discusses the structural inequalities and shared crises confronting working-class minority communities in urban California and the nation as a whole, in a political climate that since the Reagan era has left schools underfunded and police and prison budgets bloated. He speaks of the creation of "carceral cities" in which the state deals with the social problems of inner cities (poverty, illiteracy, drug trafficking, crime) not by increasing social services and aid programs but by fine tuning its methods of surveillance and social control. Specifically in

California, “the Department of Corrections with 29 major ‘campuses’ is already more expensive than the University of California system” (Davis 1998:417). In bitter irony, Davis observes

> [s]chools...have become more like prisons. Even as per capita education spending has plummeted in many local school districts, scarce resources are being absorbed in fortifying school grounds and hiring more armed security police. Teenagers complain bitterly about overcrowded classrooms and demoralized teachers, about decaying campuses that have become little more than daytime detention centers for an abandoned generation. (1998:381)

It was during this period that the term “hip-hop activism” emerged to describe a then-nascent form of political praxis that leveraged the artistic forms of hip-hop—MCing/rapping, DJing, b-boying and b-girling, and graffiti art—in a variety of creative and politicized ways. In the mainstream news media, “hip-hop activism” was invoked to refer to everything from the high-profile activities of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (a political action group founded by rap impresario Russell Simmons, which successfully mobilized high-profile rappers and everyday folks against education cuts in New York City in 2002) to smaller-scale locally based economic- and social-justice campaigns fueled by youth-leadership organizations.

The Bay Area led the nation in the latter kinds of efforts, most notably with a highly vocal campaign that against Proposition 21, an extremely punitive California ballot initiative introduced in 1999 that would make it easier to try minors as adults and imprison them for felonies that had previously only been misdemeanors. Out of those efforts emerged what would remain for several years a fairly cohesive agenda, summarized under the banners of “Books Not Bars,” “Schools Not Jails,” and “Education not Incarceration,” apropos political sloganeering considering California houses the

world's third-largest prison system yet ranks near the bottom of the nation in terms of educational spending and academic achievement. This state of affairs in California and in the U.S. more generally has been characterized by many as a "war on youth." Lawrence Grossberg develops this idea, and couches it in terms of a profound disinvestment in future generations, as long-term progressive goals of full enfranchisement and civil rights for underprivileged individuals have been largely abandoned in favor of short-term profit and punitive measures of social control and containment. In contrast to the political right's empty rhetoric of "family values," Grossberg points to a fundamental discursive shift in which youth are viewed in the mainstream no longer as vulnerable or innocent but instead as threatening and alien; they are no longer "at risk" but instead *the source* of risk to the social order:

> Kids are no longer innocents who have to be protected, long the dominant view of childhood in the United States in the twentieth century. Nor are they small adults who can be held responsible (but must also be given benefits). Rather, they are another species, some kind of animal, and we are failing to civilize, to domesticate them. (2001:124)

Rather than acknowledge the larger structural, global-economic circumstances that negatively affect young people in both inner-cities and suburbs, most public discussions of the social problems associated with youth, especially violence, drugs, and early pregnancy, either blame youths themselves—as inherently wild, aggressive, out of control—or scapegoat the "corrupting" media they consume. Of course, hip-hop comes out at the top of the list of "toxic" media steering kids toward antisocial and criminal behaviors, despite the fact that the actual youth crime rate steadily declined during the period those discussions emerged in 1980s and 1990s.

Entirely contrary to attempts to stigmatize hip-hop, during the "No on Prop. 21" campaign hip-hop culture became an affective, unifying force around which to build a multiethnic statewide youth coalition. In a homespun version of "edutainment," benefit performances and consciousness-raising events were among the earliest efforts. Most notable were the "guerrilla" hip-hop concerts organized by poet Marcel Diallo (founder of the Black Dot Artist Collective and New Black World mentioned in Chapter Four) as well as outspoken Oakland rapper Boots Riley from the veteran political rap group the Coup, who performed at various locations throughout the Bay Area on the back of an amplifier-equipped flatbed truck. Another instance of rap-and-politics synthesis occurred that same year, when activists from various youth-organizing groups bum rushed the lobby of the luxury Hilton Hotel in downtown San Francisco, shutting it down in protest of Hilton Hotels Corporation's support of Prop. 21. As Bay Area radio personality and community activist Davey D recounts, the hip-hop activists "raised their fists and began chanting in unison a customized version to the popular rhyme featured in the Sugar Hill Gang classic 'Rapper's Delight.'

> Hotel, motel, and the Hilton
> If you start a war on youth
> You ain't gonna win!"

Davey D adds, "The youth then entered the hotel lobby while still holding up raised fists and began chanting a customized version of the chorus to DMX's 'Ruff Ryder's Anthem.'

> Stop! Drop! People Gonna Rise To the Top!
> Ooh! Ooh! Prop 21's Gotta To Go!" (Davey D 2000)

At the various rallies and consciousness-raising events that I attended during that time, I was struck by the multiracial character of the young crowds. Commenting on the multiculturalism of such protests, No-on-21 leader Jay Imani remarked, "[o]n a march, if the chants have a hip-hop flavor, young people will join. It's also been crucial for drawing together youth of all colors—because hip-hop is multiethnic from the get" (qtd. in Martinez 2000). Though I would spend much of the early millennium (2002 to 2005) in Austin, Texas doing graduate coursework, I would return to the Bay Area—a place I consider home—during summers and continue to be impressed by the sustained energy of these activists and the diversity of their coalitions. I was so impressed that I decided to make multiracial Bay Area hip-hop activism the topic of my dissertation. This would enable me to talk about how a form of popular culture could be used as a tool for progressive social change—to explore how people "resist through rituals," as Stuart Hall suggests (1976), and how and when those rituals can become a form of *realpolitik*.

Although Prop. 21 ultimately passed in 2000, opposition to it brought about unique and lasting coalitions of activists and helped politicize a population of young adults—many of them black, Latino, and Asian—who might otherwise have never been exposed to such ideas and activities. For a number of years thereafter, these activists toiled away on various campaigns and by 2004 could claim two significant victories: they had halted construction of a massive juvenile detention center in the East Bay suburb of Dublin and had successfully lobbied the state legislature to overhaul the California Youth Authority (CYA), the U.S.'s largest and most ineffective juvenile corrections system.

But somewhere around 2004, about a year before I returned to begin conducting field research, the movement appeared to be flagging. Hip-hop scholar S. Craig Watkins

assesses the situation thusly: “On the one hand, [Bay Area hip-hop activists’] efforts represented a breakthrough in hip hop’s career as protest politics but, on the other hand, their efforts also demonstrated the limitations of protest politics. Protest politics are reactive rather than proactive” (2005:185). As a result, some of the coalitions that had been jumping-off points for hip-hop activism had begun to dissolve due to disorganization or lack of funding. The community-based organizations that survived had had to professionalize, bureaucratize, and in some cases conform to the expectations of the private foundations and government agencies funding them in order to establish themselves within Northern California’s vast nonprofit landscape. For some youth-leadership groups, this meant cutting back on the specifically “cultural” aspects of their work (including classes in the hip-hop arts of rapping, freestyle poetry, DJing, urban muralism, street dance, etc.) that were viewed by as extraneous by public officials and funders looking for quantifiable results-driven programming focused on academic improvement, crime prevention, and public safety. Even some of the adult “Schools Not Jails” leaders considered expenditures of highly limited funds on arts and cultural programs superfluous to their single-issue protest efforts (Somos 1, personal communication, 2007). At the same time, the Bay Area experienced a severe spike in the juvenile and young-adult homicide rate in the mid-2000s, which further compelled youth organizations to move away from grassroots activist campaigns and toward more brass-tacks violence-prevention strategies.

Perhaps coincidentally, the waning of Bay Area hip-hop activism coincided with the emergence of the hyphy movement, which lent itself less easily to social-justice organizing efforts than “conscious” hip-hop, given hyphy’s ludic preoccupations,

controversial forms, and ambiguously "progressive" politics. Still, the upswing in hip-hop generation organizing during the first half of the 2000s led to the founding of numerous youth-leadership organizations that continue to provide essential services and enrichment opportunities for young people using hip-hop culture as a recruitment and engagement tool. The Bay Area is home to a rich network of such organizations, all valiantly attempting to fill some of the gaps in education and social services that have been defunded in California over the past several decades.[81] In order to "meet the youth where they're at"—a phrase I heard repeatedly in conversations with youth-services providers—youth-development organizations have increasingly enlisted hyphy hip-hop in their efforts, with surprising results. Among the most ardent advocates of this approach is Youth UpRising (YU), the "youth leadership development" organization I became involved with while conducting fieldwork.

The "Grimy Kids"

When I began my fieldwork, Youth UpRising seemed like a good place to start. I had heard the organization was attracting young people by the droves, and had become a hub of local hip-hop culture by providing the space, the instruction, and the technical resources necessary for young people to create their own art and produce their own media. This was an unusually high-tech youth center outfitted with state-of-the-art recording studios, digital editing suites, and the like—in the middle of "Deep East

[81] These organizations include Youth UpRising, the Ella Baker Center, Youth Together/Organize Da Bay, Youth Movement Records, The DJ Project, Bay Unity Music Project (BUMP), YO! Youth Outlook, Conscious Youth Media Crew, H.O.M.E.Y. (Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth), AYPAL (Asian Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy & Leadership), Eastside Arts Alliance, and Leadership Excellence—to name just the best known.

Oakland," no less, an area with poverty rates at twice the national average. I also understood that YU was born of collaborative organizing efforts among multiracial young adults. Such collaborations were the result of highly successful conflict-mediation work coordinated by another youth-serving nonprofit, Youth Together (YT), to address ongoing racial hostility between African-American and Latino teenagers at adjacent Castlemont High School—hostilities that erupted into a stabbing and a brutal beating in 1998 (Hamburg 1999).

Before setting foot there, I envisioned YU as some sort multiracial hip-hop haven, born out of hard-won struggle. The experiences I proceeded to have there continually surprised, confounded, and impressed me. When I first arrived to "the center" (as locals familiarly refer to it), I couldn't help but be impressed by the space itself: a 25,000 square-foot building[82] adorned inside and out with vivid colors and unique local art. Upon entrance, I was immediately greeted by a young member[83] manning the reception desk to which a DJ booth was permanently affixed. Shortly thereafter, I was given a tour and shown the different areas in the building where an extensive array of services are offered, organized around departmental programming areas focused on health and wellness, media arts and culture, career and education, and social enterprise—the latter being represented by a hip member-run cyber café that was open to the public—the kind

[82] As testament to pervasive disinvestment in the area, YU resides in a building that used to be a Safeway supermarket, but went out of business the 1970s and stood abandoned for decades. Since that period, major retailers have been reluctant to set up shop on or near this once-thriving commercial corridor of MacArthur Boulevard, the perception being that poor people lack the purchasing power to patronize their businesses.
[83] YU serves 13 to 24 year-old Alameda County residents, requiring each to become a member in order to take advantage of the facilities and programs. Membership is free, and many of YU's employees are drawn from its membership pool.

of gourmet-coffee-serving establishment commonplace in college towns like Berkeley, but in Deep East Oakland virtually unheard of due to rampant disinvestment.

Having volunteered my services in any capacity they saw fit, I walked in thinking I would be placed in one of those program areas working directly with members. I seemed a likely candidate for tutoring work in the Career & Ed department or I thought perhaps I could teach some sort of writing workshop in Media Arts, since I had experience as a journalist. Assuming also that YU was an activism-oriented nonprofit, I figured there was no limit to the amount of volunteer help needed with organizing campaigns. The latter assumption turned out to be somewhat misguided, a fact I found out early on during a screening interview with Olis Simmons, YU's charismatic Executive Director. In response to my queries, she informed me that "YU is not an activist shop"—at least not "activist" in the radicalized protest- and campaign-based sense that was typical of the short-lived hip-hop activist movement. According to Simmons, "we're trying to reach the 'grimy kids,' the kids on probation, on parole, in the system, in group homes and foster care"—in other words, the most disenfranchised, underserved populations whose interests the "Schools Not Jails" campaigns purported to serve. For Simmons, the term "grimy" is not meant to imply literal "grime" or unkemptness (although for a minority of the most chronically neglected and stigmatized youth, this is sometimes the case) but trauma and public-systems entanglements. In order to reach them, Simmons explained, you have to "meet them where they're at," and in most cases young people who are literally struggling to survive—to avoid being another homicide victim, and to deal with shocking privations like hunger and homelessness—are

not in a place where community organizing is high on their agenda. “Those ‘Schools Not Jails’ protests were mostly college-going or college-bound kids,” Simmons informed me.

This fact was corroborated by numerous veterans of the hip-hop activist movement I spoke to during the course of my research, including Omana Imani. In 1997, Imani co-founded Underground Railroad, a hip-hop feminist organization that produced many key events and media that helped galvanize Bay Area hip-hop activism, including the inaugural “Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex” conference at U.C. Berkeley in September 1998, which featured local conscious hip-hop group Zion I and keynote speaker Angela Davis. According to Imani,

> What I remember feeling a lot of times was, yes, we were incredibly multiracial, and I don’t really know how we did it, but we weren’t very diverse in terms of class. And so it would bother me to feel like we were talking about the liberation of poor and working-class communities when a lot of the people involved didn’t know that experience…Which isn’t necessarily bad. They were all well intentioned. But on some level you can’t connect with poor and working-class communities if you’re not from there…You need to spend the time and resources to develop people from that community, who’ve experienced that, who can directly relate.

By the time I interviewed Imani in 2007, she had transitioned into a full-time program coordinator at Youth UpRising, where she was able to employ her organizing and mentoring skills as the head of an in-house youth-leadership team comprised of individuals in their teens and early twenties, who were charged with key duties in the center including new-member orientations, workshop facilitations, and public outreach. In comparing her experiences as an activist/organizer with those as the YU “RiseUp Team” leader, Imani speaks enthusiastically about both, and proudly relates how most of her current mentees have become civically active in one form or another (as public speakers, youth advocates and organizers, members of boards and commissions), but she

acknowledges that the kinds of mass-mobilizations necessary for large activist campaigns is difficult among the most “high impact” low-income youth. According to Imani,

> I think when you’re trying to organize someone who is up against so many messed up conditions, they don’t want to hear that. They’re like, “Do you have a job for me? It would only pay $6 an hour? I can’t manage”—or, you know, “I can’t really breathe,” or “I have problems with my attention span,” or “I just need more money,” you know? So there’s a lot of barriers. There’s a huge stress barrier.

The solution for YU has been to cultivate social “consciousness” in a more holistic way that starts with basic services like healthcare, job training, and case management to make sure members are, on some fundamental level, healthy and safe. Consciousness raising and community work often extends from there, or is cleverly integrated into basic-service provision. This is a far cry from the more focused politicizing efforts of hip-hop activists, who were often outsiders to the communities they approached and claimed to represent. Rapper Ise Lyfe recalls being one of the young people recruited into the No-on-21 campaign:

> There were all these people who in ’96, ’97, enrolled in U.C. Davis, U.C. Berkeley and majored in Ethnic Studies. And then these people started nonprofits, with these theories and ideas… I was one of the kids that somebody came up to and was like, “Do you know what the prison industrial complex is?” “No.”…It wasn’t a bad thing. I’m a product of that. And I give thanks for being politicized by organizations and people, including organizers from the community that really care. But at the end of the day that structure is failing young people. Again, the movement, the standing up, has to come from the actual communities.

As far as hip-hop’s role in a native-based youth-programming model like that of YU, many No-on-21 veterans concede that overtly political or “conscious” rap is not the way to get the attention of young people from the ‘hood. Imani recalls, “When I first came to Youth UpRising and I was doing some event-production stuff for them, I tried to

bring in the old-school hip-hop. They didn't respond to it. And so for the first year I was, like, completely frustrated. I was like, shit, what are we gonna do?...It doesn't move them in the same way, and it's not what's playing on the radio for the most part." Another No-on-21 alum, Nicole Lee, concurs with Imani's observations. As violence-prevention specialist for the Ella Baker Center, a prominent Oakland civil-rights nonprofit that partnered with YU on its "Silence the Violence" campaign, Lee explains "where we're trying to use hip-hop in activism is not through 'political hip-hop' because I just don't think that's what kids listen to." Lee describes Silence the Violence campaign's bold attempts to, much like YU, "politicize the turf and hyphy rappers." She elaborates,

> For us, it's really a question of how do we get the Mistah FABs and the Clyde Carsons of the world and the people that really have these kids' ears to start saying positive things that resonate…I've found that, especially around the issue violence, rappers are willing to get involved. But I think the Bay Area rap scene right now is in this precarious position. Nobody knows if this hyphy thing is going to succeed or not. And if I was one of those rappers, I would be hustling my ass off too. It's make-it-or-break-it time. So I understand. That's what they're supposed to be doing. I want them to be national superstars. I'm not trying to make them into something they're not. The question for me is, how do I respect that and hold the space for that to be the way it is, but then also push them to work for the community? And I think most of these guys have their hearts in the right place. A lot of these rappers, if given the opportunity to talk about it, they really care about what's going on.

Such efforts have in fact been fairly successful. Both YU and the Ella Baker Center have been able to enlist a number of local hip-hop celebrities to help with various causes—not always at the level of sustained involvement, but certainly by lending local star power to community programs and grassroots campaigns, hardcore rappers have helped drum up support and 'hood-based collaborations among the very people hip-hop activists had so much trouble reaching: the OGs, the young hustlers, and the "grimy kids."

Street-Knowledge Staffing

If the aim of Youth UpRising is to recruit insiders, then my fit into the organization proved tenuous, as neither an Oakland native nor someone who grew up experiencing the "hardcore" privations of abject poverty. Initially, I wound up being encouraged to apply for a paid position as part-time grant writer, an opportunity I jumped at, imagining that being on staff would be an ideal way to actively participate in the day-to-day efforts of the organization and gain entrée into the hyphy-centric community it serves. As I took on the position, however, I soon realized this consigned me to an administrative branch of the organization and entailed little interaction with members—an office area physically set off to side of the building, behind locked doors.

The period I spent slogging away in the unromantic role of a grant writer proved difficult for me. I often felt torn between knowing I was providing a vital service for YU and enjoying being a part of a dedicated crew of (adult) employees who were in many ways the backbone of the organization, but at the same time feeling frustrated by the sense that I was doing little to further my "research agenda"; I also felt uncomfortable with the fact that I, indeed, had some sort of "agenda" that seemed somehow submerged or hidden (even though I disclosed the fact that I was doing dissertation research to the staff). I now realize, however, that those experiences were extremely revealing about the way YU successfully manages to attract large numbers of kids from the troubled area it serves, and how it became a hub of the hyphy movement.

Central to this, as stated previously, is an organizational commitment to hiring employees who reflect the population YU serves, particularly in the case of those working directly with youth as program leads and mentors. Among the adult staff, YU

hires people who can stand as credible role models among a population of young people whose survival in many cases has depended upon being wise to the ways of the streets. Not coincidentally, most employees are people of color from backgrounds similar to members, who share similar knowledges and experiences. Although quite a few of the adult staff are college-educated professionals with previous experience in social services and nonprofit administration, others bring less academic but equally valued "street" knowledge to the table. These are "OGs" like Percy (mentioned in Chapter Two), a reformed hustler turned conflict mediator, and Mario B. (mentioned in Chapter Three), a former crack addict who now runs an extremely popular fashion and modeling program, and is in large part responsible for establishing YU as safe space for openly gay youth.

At YU, "native" experience and understanding are the highest forms of cultural capital employees potentially offer. And from the first moment I walked into the building, as an overeager and overeducated doctoral student, it was plainly obvious that I had close to none. So it was off to the administration office for me! Rather than resent this positioning, I now thoroughly understand its logic. Repeatedly during my time on staff, employees (both young and old) would use language and invoke vernacular concepts entirely alien to me even though I fancied myself to be a hip and informed hip-hop "head." It was the height of the hyphy movement, and there was so much new slang being generated by young people in East Oakland—an undisputed nexus of hyphy—that only true insiders could keep up with it all. I can recall, during a staff meeting, hearing a series of then-foreign words to me—"boppers," "rippers," and "cupcaking"—which came up in a discussion about maintaining appropriate codes of conduct between young men and women members. Given my investment in an in-the-know hip-hop identity, I initially

loathed this sense of cluelessness, of being an interloper, but I eventually acknowledged my limitations and acceded to the role. That particular day, I turned to my coworker, who explained that "bopper" and "ripper" were both derogatory words for women thought to be sexually promiscuous (a fact I would have known had I been doing my hyphy homework and listening Mistah FAB songs intently enough) while "cupcaking" was a less demeaning term for flirting.

The perception of my outsiderness within that community in large part derived from speech patterning, in my lack of local "slanguage" and my use of white middle-class "Standard American English" (SAE) almost exclusively—as opposed to the deft forms of "code-switching" between SAE and "African-American Vernacular English" (AAVE) that are so common among African Americans, including most YU employees; interestingly, this included several Latino and South Asian staffers, a fact that echoes previous observations about the increasing proximities among non-white "minorities" growing up in what used to be segregated black ghettos but have now become racially mixed "contact zones." It speaks, again, to a "fascinating reality of recent black cultural traffic…[that] we are approaching a time when the relationship between black cultures and performance by blacks is becoming highly problematic" (K. Jackson 2005:9).

Despite such forms of racialized and classed linguistic markers, it is interesting to note the ways in which I was, at various times, differently interpellated in terms of race at YU. I identify as Chicana, although only my mother is Mexican American. My father is white and speaks only English. Although my mother is a native Spanish speaker, she was highly "assimilated" into white middle-class linguistic and cultural norms during her childhood, and bears no sign of a Spanish accent, nor is she particularly savvy to *Caló*-

inflected "Chicano English." So I grew up in an English-speaking household in a middle-class neighborhood. I contend that YU members and employees, without knowing all of this, picked up on my racial and class outsiderness primarily through language use or, more precisely, my inability to competently code-switch between SAE and AAVE or, for that matter, Chicano English, which would have won me some "street credibility" as well, despite the majority of the staff being African American.

At the same time, my phenotypic features appear to most people as ambiguously "ethnic." Given my dark-brown curly hair and olive-toned skin, most people assume I am something short of "white," although just what that might be varies widely, from Mediterranean to Latina to Middle Eastern. On a number of occasions, my Chicana-ness seemed firmly established, as when Olis Simmons commended me for working toward my doctorate, saying something to the effect of "we need more women of color to enter into academia and occupy powerful positions." Part of this is due, however, to my own active role in establishing my Chicana identity. This crystallized at one point when I had the opportunity to be one of the facilitators of a "Black-Brown Unity" consciousness-raising workshop on Cesar Chavez Day at YU, working alongside BRWN BFLO Somos 1 (a part-time contractor with the center) and several young employees on presentations highlighting the historical crosscurrents and shared struggles of African Americans and Latinos, which drew a large crowd of mostly African-American participants—reflective of the overall black-dominant demographics of the center (more on that to follow). At other times at YU, I was identified as a "white girl" by Simmons and other coworkers, including a male colleague who I ran into one afternoon while jogging around Oakland's Lake Merritt; after giving each other a collegial hug, I apologized for being sweaty and

he jokingly responded "yeah, I don't want to go home smelling like a white girl," as if whiteness were suspect and foreign enough to have a distinguishable smell.

I spent much of my time at YU trying to avoid being perceived as an interloper or, worse, singled out a poseur, despite my fears that I was precisely that. During staff icebreakers, I barely skated by on my limited knowledge of black urban culture and, whenever I could, proffered my devotion to the "hip-hop nation" as a second-rate stand-in for direct experience, a sign of my "racial sincerity" (J. Jackson 2005). For instance, on my first day at work, I was asked to undergo an employee initiation rite called the "fishbowl" in which I had to field questions about myself from everyone on staff—mostly innocuous inquiries into what my "favorite things" were. After mentioning that I was a big fan of hip-hop, and was in fact doing my dissertation on it, one woman asked me to name my favorite rap lyric. Put on the spot like that, my mind went blank. I somehow came up with "the rose that came from concrete," actually a line from a Tupac Shakur poem, not a song, but it seemed to suffice and even impress a few. Later that year at a staff retreat we were asked to go around in a circle and each perform a dance step from our youths—an activity that was supposed to be fun but for me caused beads of nervous flop-sweat to shoot down my back, since there were only two moves I could properly perform, and only a few more that I even knew of, as opposed to the repository of dozens most people in the room seemed to be able to draw from. When the turn-taking got to me, I was incredibly relieved to find no one else had chosen the "sideways body roll," an old standby of mine.

Sometimes this disjuncture I felt between "racial sincerity" and any attempt to assert a modicum of "racial authenticity" (J. Jackson 2005:15) led to amusing moments,

as during one morning-meeting go-around when the staff was asked to state the city in which they we were born. I noticed most people were choosing to name the exact location, i.e. the one that appeared on their birth certificates; in some cases Bay Area natives even specified the hospital. As the exercise went around I debated my options: Los Angeles, in that I was born in the "Greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Area," if not the city of L.A. proper; or Topanga Canyon, an unincorporated rural enclave in the Santa Monica mountains where I first resided but which few people have ever heard of. I decided to go with the third option, the town on my birth certificate, because I was curious of the effect it would have: Inglewood. To this, I received a round of laughter and a few emphatic low-pitched "shout outs" of "Inglewooooood!" in mock gangster-rap inflection. Inglewood, a predominately black and Latino inner-city area in Greater L.A., is one of those places with a 'hood reputation, one that confers "street cred" upon residents and makes a mark on the hip-hop "mattering map."[84] The laughter elicited from the idea that I could be from Inglewood was testament to the aura of white middle classness or "bourgie-ness" I carried, despite sincere efforts to downplay those privileges.

Teaching with Too $hort

By the time of the Inglewood incident, I had become more comfortable with my no-"cred" standing at YU, and knew the laughter was not cruelly intended. I had divested

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[84] In the spoken *outro* of the Tupac Shakur-Dr. Dre collabo "California Love" (1996), the two rappers give shout outs to Inglewood among a number of other Southern and Northern California cities: Dre: "Long Beach in the house. Oaktown, Oakland definitely in the house. Frisco, Frisco." Tupac: "Hey, you know L.A. is up in this." Dre: "Pasadena, where you at? Inglewood, Inglewood always up to no good." Tupac: "Even Hollywood tryin' to get a piece baby." Dre: "Sacramento, Sacramento where you at?" Gangster rapper Mack 10, a native of Inglewood, also pays homage to the city on the track "Inglewood Swangin'," in his hit album *Based on a True Story* (1997).

myself of the illusion that merely living in Oakland, having brown skin, and loving hip-hop were adequate means of ‘hood authentication; even more importantly, I realized that being a “non-native” did not incur suspicion or aspersion; the only way it would do so was if I attempted to “walk on front street,” i.e. “front” or pretend to be something I was not (as Adisa Banjoko and T-KASH suspected of John Brown in Chapter Four). It was not lost on me that another employee, a member of the finance team who in appearance and demeanor resembled a modern-day Doris Day (compared to her I looked like Assata Shakur!) was a cherished full-time member of the YU team, much appreciated for her experience in the corporate world balancing books.

Eventually, after gaining the confidence and trust of YU’s programming leads, I did become more involved in direct youth services as a volunteer. It took awhile to find an appropriate niche, however. I made one unsuccessful attempt to start a magazine-writing class, which I envisioned as appealing to young people who wanted to write about arts, fashion, music, and lifestyle—our own in-house version of *Teen Vogue* or *XXL*! The class failed to attract enough participants, partly due to my own inadequate recruitment efforts, and partly due to the fact that, among a young population in which the majority are struggling just to stay in school, taking an extracurricular writing class held little appeal. This is not to say there are not numerous YU members who enjoy expressing themselves through the written word: through poetry, songwriting, personal narrative, etc. They simply prefer telling their stories using more high-tech digital media, and particularly seem to enjoy multimedia projects combining any or all the elements of filmmaking, digital photography, audio recording, graphic arts, and web production—all skills taught at YU.

Another media-arts program idea I pitched to YU was to run some workshops for aspiring rappers and entertainers on press-packet preparation, a skill I knew well having been on the receiving end of so many PR-devised publicity materials as a music journalist. A bizarre and advantageous convergence occurred in 2008, when one of the program directors offered to take me up on the idea by adding me as co-instructor for a YU "artist development" class. For this, I would be paired with another unlikely volunteer: the millionaire multi-platinum Oakland rapper Too $hort, who was one of YU's biggest supporters. "Too $hort class," as it came to be known, was as indelible an experience for me as it was for the students, who idolize the iconic rapper. Among the many valuable lessons Too $hort offered, students seemed especially keen to learn about publishing and proprietary-rights from him, a concern that seemed a little premature to me given most of these young hustlers were so under-underground they hadn't yet begun to turn a profit from their music. But these were kids with big American dreams, and anything related to "getting paid" and securing an economic "come up" received their utmost attention.

I thoroughly enjoyed playing "teacher's assistant" to Too $hort's "professor," watching him drop knowledge on our students about the ins and outs of the music industry while intermittently chiming in, particularly regarding matters related to publicity and promotion. Thankfully, my input proved useful, particularly my "how-to" guidance on the press-pack project, which makes perfect sense given the local emphasis on self-promotional hustle and street-based "out-the-trunk" distribution. I had finally found a form of "cultural capital" I could offer that had direct use value for YU members. I was even able to leverage my connections within the more "backpacker" side of the

local hip-hop scene, in combination with Too $hort's irrefutable clout in the "hardcore" and hyphy realm, to create an activity for students that provided a big payoff both materially and emotionally: our culminating publicity-photo shoot.

Over and over, I had been told by YU program leads that the most appreciated kinds of services are the ones that offer direct socioeconomic reward (and not just some abstract form of "enrichment"): things like job training and/or placement, projects offering paid stipends or wages, even free bus passes or meals. So I figured it was time for me to bring the goods. To do so, I negotiated a trade. I approached Upper Playground, one of only a handful of local hip-hop fashion companies, and asked if they were interested in providing some free "swag" (free merchandise set aside for promotions) in exchange for publicity shots that Too $hort had agreed to take wearing their clothing. Upper Playground, whose two shops are located in the San Francisco hipster hub of the Haight-Ashbury and the U.C. Berkeley main drag of Telegraph Avenue—and whose consumer base is primarily young, white, bourgie backpackers—accepted the offer, knowing an appearance by Too $hort in their apparel could significantly increase their street-cred quotient. On the day of the photo shoot, not only did Upper Playground bring a bountiful array of hoodie sweatshirts, t-shirts, and baseball hats for the students, they also offered the services of their own professional photographer.

Although almost none of the YU students had ever heard of Upper Playground, they liked the high-contrast multihued colorways and graffiti-style scripts and figures that are the urban streetwear line's signature aesthetics. The stylistic convergence happening at that time between hyphy and skateboarder-hipster subcultures proved a perfect moment for Upper Playground to introduce its brand to the "grimy" kids of Deep East

Oakland, who were actually some of the most fashion-conscious, innovatively outfitted, and sartorially turned-out people I have ever met. I drew a big sigh of relief when these arbiters of taste deemed the Upper Playground swag "tight" and "clean" (as opposed to "bootsy" or lame). And, judging by the smiles and eager attitudes of students, I was heartened to observe that the "star treatment" offered that day—the free fashion, the expert styling and makeup by Mario B., the professional lighting and cameras—seemed to be a self-esteem booster for a group of young people who usually hear the opposite message within the dominant culture: that they were expected to go nowhere; that there was something wrong with the way they talk, dress, and act; that they were likely to become just one more sad statistic.

A "Black Center"?

Although the Youth UpRising-Upper Playground photo shoot presented an instance of a successful pairing or negotiation between resources drawn from the "backpacker" and "hardcore"/hyphy hip-hop camps, typically YU draws from the latter sphere almost exclusively to appeal to their constituency, a fact most clearly evident in the organization's collaborations with Too $hort and its fostering of the turf-dancing phenomenon by offering turf-dance classes and hosting competitive "battles" since it opened in 2005. As a result, the center has become a key site in the development of the dance form. YU's strategy of using hyphy culture to attract and retain members has proven so successful that it counts an enormous membership of over 2,000 and daily traffic sometimes exceeding 300 young people.

One unintended consequence of infusing hyphy into the activities and atmosphere of the center may be the lack of appeal this holds to young new-immigrant Latinos in the Deep East Oakland neighborhoods that surround YU, from which it draws its primary membership base. Although I have devoted much of this exegesis to framing hyphy as a relatively inclusive cultural movement in terms of race and ethnicity, at the same time there is no doubt that it is an African-American-dominant cultural formation with deep roots in longstanding black regional traditions of music, dance, folklore, style, and commerce. Such traditions undergird the vibrant street culture that attracts and impacts Bay Area youth from a variety of backgrounds, particularly the non-African Americans who live in the same low-income 'hoods where those traditions developed—'hoods that used to be segregated black ghettos but are now much more mixed. These are individuals like BRWN BFLO's Big Dan, Thizz Latin's Jimmy Roses, HOMEY's Nancy Hernandez, and YU's Omana Imani (who is of European and South-Asian descent).

East Oakland—an area that includes not only the "Deep East" which YU mainly serves but also the historically Hispanic enclaves of Fruitvale and Eastlake/San Antonio—holds a sizeable and exponentially growing Latino population. Between 1990 and 2000, the East Oakland Latino population increased by 132 percent (Witt et al. 2001:12). Those increases are primarily due to new immigrants from Mexico and Central America, who have integrated fairly easily into Fruitvale and Eastlake/San Antonio—bastions of Oakland's vibrant working-class Chicano art, culture, and politics. Latin-American immigrants settling in Deep East Oakland, however, are racial newcomers to an area that, up until the 1990s, was overwhelmingly African American.

Whereas first-, second-, and third-generation Latinos like the BRWN BFLO and Thizz Latin crews connect clearly with hyphy and hip-hop generally, for Spanish-dominant new-immigrant youth, that connection is less clear. According to YU case manager Alexandra, a Chicana who works with Latino members, her clients typically arrive in complete "culture shock." Often from rural Mexican and Central American pueblos, they suddenly find themselves transported to one of the most notorious urban areas in America, and wind up overwhelmed and depressed. When I mentioned during my conversation with Alex that hip-hop might be some sort of black-brown cultural bridge to help acclimate these youth to the center and the neighborhood, she quickly interjected, "they don't listen to hip-hop. Maybe reggaeton. But mostly they listen to music in Spanish." For most new-immigrant youth, Alex relates, hip-hop represents blackness, which is precisely what they are having trouble relating to as outsiders in an African-American-dominant environment. Thus, attracting Deep East Oakland Latino youth and providing them the services they definitely need proves a difficult and ongoing struggle for YU, a hip-hop and hyphy-centric cultural space that has earned the reputation as a "black center," and must now develop strategies to become more cross-racially relevant.

Unlikely Alliances

Another consequence of using hyphy—an undeniably stigmatized cultural formation—to engage a stigmatized population of youth is that there are bound to be detractors; surprisingly few, however, and most are people who have little direct knowledge of the on-the-ground realities facing YU members and supporters. One of the

most vocal of such people is Charles Pine, an East Oakland resident who runs the public-safety website, orpn.org ("Oakland Residents for Peaceful Neighborhoods" or "ORPN"). There he repeatedly attacks YU for courting "gutter rappers" like Too $hort and Mistah FAB (who is also a frequent visitor and ardent supporter of the center), encouraging peace-disturbing "boom cars," and promoting criminal activity (sideshows, illicit drug sales, and ecstasy use) by incorporating hyphy into their programming. Specifically, Pine continually cites as objectionable Too $hort's work as mentor[85] and several YU members' involvement as turf dancers in the video shoot for E-40's hit song "Tell Me When to Go," which also features sideshow car stunts.[86]

Obsessed with crime and criminality, Pine seems to view all of Oakland's problems with violence as rooted in a "culture of disrespect" that he claims is ubiquitous among local youth and local hip-hop, and that the solution is to augment and intensify policing strategies. His website publishes comments from other similarly "concerned" citizens who are sometimes even more antagonistic than Pine. One commentator in 2007 criticized the city of Oakland for earmarking funds to support programs like YU rather than allocating more funds for police; further, he suggested that "those Oakland citizens who have been forced to endure the raping and pillaging from entitled at-risk Oakland youth" were entitled so some form of "reparations."[87] Notwithstanding the oddly oxymoronic logic inherent in the phrase "entitled at-risk youth," such racially charged remarks are nothing new to hip-hop and the populations of working-class youth of color who have played such a large role in creating, popularizing, and sustatining it, yet whose

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[85] Source: http://www.orpn.org/TooShort_YU2.htm, posted Sep. 9, 2007

[86] Source: http://www.orpn.org/sideshows2.htm, posted Jul, 21, 2006/

cultural generativity has often been overlooked in the context of “moral panics”—simplistic efforts to locate social problems in the inherently “disrespectful,” “pathological,” even “criminal” attitudes of young people or the “corrupting” cultural forms they engage with.

YU’s response to ORPN has been to invite Charles Pine to come take a tour of the center and become involved in the community of adult organizational “stakeholders”: the public officials, philanthropists, educators, service providers, civic leaders, and residents who take an active role in furthering YU’s mission (encapsulated under the catchphrase “Youth Leadership. Community Transformation”). So far Pine has declined the offer. YU takes a similarly inclusive approach with the Oakland Police Department (OPD), some of whose officers have expressed consternation over the fact that the center welcomes street-oriented rappers such as Too $hort and E-40 into its fold, given the tendency of hardcore rappers to mock and deride the police—a tradition that stems from generations of strained relations between police and inner-city residents throughout U.S., who have long complained of police harassment and excessive use of force in their communities with little redress.[88] (This in large part can account for the “no snitching” street-code ethic described in Chapter Two.) Police relations in the Oakland African-American community are easily among the worst in the nation, given numerous local law-enforcement corruption and brutality scandals over the past two decades. The most recent involved the 2009 New Year’s slaying in Fruitvale of Oscar Grant, an unarmed young black man who was shot in the back at point-blank-range by a white B.A.R.T. Police officer after being

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[87] Source: http://www.orpn.org/Brunner_BART1.htm, posted Jun. 2, 2007.

detained, cuffed, and laid prone. Several months later, when four OPD police were killed in a poorly executed arrest attempt of an armed young parole violator (also African American), many Oaklanders expressed a decidedly ambivalent sense of sympathy toward the officers (Bender & Dunlap 2009; Bulwa 2009; Burress 2009). That shooting occurred mere blocks away from YU.

With police-citizen relations as bad as they've ever been, YU and the OPD have on numerous occasions joined forces to develop community-based violence-prevention strategies, and for a period of time the OPD sent East Oakland beat officers to mandatory cultural-sensitivity training sessions at the center. In the summer of 2007, YU Executive Director Olis Simmons convened a "Rapper-Police Summit" designed specifically to improve relations between these two often antagonistic factions. The summit helped quell concerns among police that rap artists associated with YU were producing media advocating violence against them (they were not). At the same time the meeting challenged assumptions held by rappers that the "po-po" need necessarily be mistrusted and viewed as adversaries. On the day of the closed-door meeting, I recall running into Casual of the Hieroglyphics crew, all suited up and looking businesslike in a cuffed-sleeve button-down shirt and tie. Also a YU mentor at the time, Casual helped Simmons organize the summit. He nonetheless appeared uncomfortable, pulling at his collar as he explained to me how he had some misgivings about participating in the event, concerned that it could negatively affect his street credibility in the eyes of his peers. More of a backpacker MC than a street rapper, Casual nonetheless carries the respect of the

[88] Police derision takes its most famous form in N.W.A.'s "Fuck tha Police" (1988), a song that condemns the L.A.P.D. for unwarranted use of force, brutality, and racial profiling.

"streets" as an East Oakland native and hustle-hard entrepreneur. In the latter realm, street cred is a form of capital and key to a rapper's success. Admirably, he joined in the effort anyway, acknowledging the significant impact thawed relations between police and hip-hoppers could have on public safety.

Building these kinds of unlikely alliances are among the cornerstones of YU's approach to "community transformation"—and what sets it apart from more traditional social-justice activist groups that use timeworn New Left-style tactics of direct-action, petitions, demonstrations, and boycotts to affect change, and often meet with disappointing results. At YU one might encounter, on one day, one of the hardest of the hardcore local rappers and, on another, the governor of the state of California. Indeed, this is precisely what I observed while working there. In December of 2006, the YU holiday party for members attracted nearly every luminary from the local hardcore and hyphy rap scene, including Too $hort, Mistah FAB, E-40, B-Legit, the Wolf Pack, Dem Hoodstarz, the Jacka, Mac Mall, Clyde Carson, Ray Luv, DJ Backside, and Traxamillion, who all (ostensibly) donated funds to pay for ample supplies of sneakers, warm winter clothing, and even underclothes for members that were distributed as holiday gifts—a kind of 'hoodspace potlatch. A good-PR photo-op for the artists, they nonetheless helped make the event feel special for members, and the whole affair went off without any major snafus, challenging broader assumptions in the law-enforcement and business community that "hyphy" gatherings inevitably devolve into chaos and violence.

During the party, I was tasked with helping corral artists into the recording-booth area and prepping them to record PSA (public service announcement) "drops" advocating positive public-health and safety messages: stay in school, wear a condom, and the like.

Back in the media-arts area, artists were gathered casually, eating and joking around. Mistah FAB, a witty and outgoing character ever-ready to "clown" and "snap" on conversational rivals, had grabbed much of the attention. A staff videographer roved around documenting the event, and when his camera turned to FAB, the rapper entered full performance mode. Assuming mock-earnest composure and tone, he offered a few clichés about "giving back to the community" and "supporting the youth" but his final on-camera statement was purposely more provocative: "We're doing this for the crack babies."

The irreverent comment elicited nervous giggles and a few hearty laughs from bystanders in the room. References to the population YU serves as the "crack baby generation" came up more than a few times during my fieldwork, and it was never cruelly intended. More accurately, it was meant to describe a generation of young people victimized by the historical circumstances of their birth, a period in which American inner cities declined in livability; when most of the blue-collar jobs that had once sustained those areas had evaporated; when education and social services were cut back at the very moment they were needed most; when cheap crack cocaine became widely available, and became a highly lucrative black-market commodity; and when harsh "War on Drugs" sentencing changes created massively overflowing prison populations comprised mostly of black and Latino low-risk and nonviolent drug offenders. Today 1 out of every 15 African-American men in the U.S. is behind bars, and one out every 36 Latinos (Warren 2008:6).

Although Mistah FAB's comment may have at first sounded like an insult, or a wisecrack at the members' expense, it can also be understood as an appropriation, a

"queering," or a carnivalesque inversion of the cruelly stigmatizing Reagan-era "crack baby" discourse that blamed poor addicted mothers for having "permanently and genetically damaged" their children due to uterine drug use (Reeves & Campbell 1994:211). Media scholars Jimmie Reeves and Richard Campbell argue such discourses were developed by political leaders to justify and garner support for increasingly punitive "War on Drugs" suppressive policies. But as Reeves and Campbell make plain in their analysis of this media-propelled moral panic, such victim-blaming explanations contradict clear medical evidence showing that the surge in premature births, unhealthy babies, and infant mortality during the 1980s "had less to do with cocaine than with Reagan's budget cuts and his doctrines of privatization and deregulation," causing soaring rates of mothers who received no prenatal care. Reeves and Campbell also refute assumptions that children born under the harsh prenatal and environmental conditions associated with poverty and drug use are necessarily physically "damaged"; rather it is the act of stigmatizing and labeling them "crack babies" that leads to harmful perceptions of youth who are "impaired," who are "problem children" and "burdens on society" (215). They are then treated accordingly, as if they were themselves the cause of social problems, not the victims.

In 2007, Mistah FAB released an ode to this burdened generation, "Crack Baby Anthem," which acknowledges the perils and sense of desperation faced by young hustlers:

> My little homie on the block got hustle, got dreams/Y'all got milk, my little homie got cream[89]/See ain't his fault ma and pop's a fiend/Matter fact last night pops copped some cream/Y'all never know the struggle 'til you live by the bundle/Only way you

[89] "Cream" is street slang for either money or cocaine.

> eat, that depend on how you hustle…Turfs in the air represent where they from/They don't care, they gon' keep going dumb/Hands on his ear, man he don't hear/Mama smoked out and daddy ain't here (2007).

In a blog post on the *XXL* website, FAB appoints himself as spokesperson for this generation—a generation he himself belongs to, as someone born in 1983 to a pimp father and formerly crack-addicted mother: "We represent the youth, the stressed-out teens who have no hope, no faith, no family and no concerns if they live or die. So, they run around looking for a better way. [The hyphy] movement is their outlet" (FAB 2006).

From Crack Babies to Poster Children

At the same time YU provided me with opportunities to comprehend "street" knowledge and 'hoodcentric understandings in settings like the holiday party, it also offered a glimpse into, strangely enough, the "official" public culture of government agencies and bureaucracies. I gleaned this as a grant writer but also as peripheral witness to the numerous press conferences YU lends its space to at the request of another kind of hustler: the career politician. To show good faith to the various public agencies YU collaborates with, Executive Director Olis Simmons occasionally allows local officials and legislators to hold photo-op events at the center, including California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who in May of 2007 made an appearance to announce the launch of a statewide anti-gang initiative. Although this would involve the kinds of suppressive techniques YU regularly advocates against prioritizing (satellite surveillance, drug "stings," gang injunctions, etc.), it would also entail community based violence-prevention, intervention, and mitigation work the organization is deeply committed to.

Press-conference organizers requested that a number of young members attend the event, which undoubtedly offered an interesting civic-engagement opportunity for previously disenfranchised youth. Read more cynically, however, the young members acted as a kind of "set dressing" for the gubernatorial display, lending a feel-good veneer of authenticity, vitality, and preemptive success to the governor's crime-fighting efforts, as literal "poster children" for the triumph of public-safety measures. I mention this not to criticize YU for allowing members to participate, but to point out the ways in which low-income "at risk" black and brown youth are often symbolically deployed by powerful outside interests for political gain—either negatively as "crack babies" or in a more flattering light, as "poster children." And these outsiders, in stark contrast to YU's compassionate and street-savvy staff, typically neither understand the realities facing marginalized 'hood youth nor do they necessarily have young people's best interests at heart. After all, it is the kinds of highly punitive forms of law enforcement Governor Schwarzenegger was proposing that in large part led to the problems he was trying to address: California's overcrowded prisons—with their staggering 70 percent recidivism rate (the highest in the nation)—now serve as breeding grounds for gang recruitment and criminal training, and most parolees come out jail even more likely to commit serious offenses than they were when they went in.

Still, Simmons contends that the best way to serve the interests of YU's member population is to "infiltrate from the inside"—to infiltrate street culture with positive messaging and infiltrate government with innovative youth-driven "community transformation" strategies that can influence policy. In working closely with both public officials and street-oriented "stakeholders," YU covers tenuous and often conflictual

ground, but in doing so opens up new spaces for East Oakland natives and “grimy kids” to become agents of change.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this analysis, I have attempted to walk a fine line—to chart a path along a precarious, haze-enveloped "bridge," if you will, jammed with heterogeneous forms of cultural traffic and noisy with reverberating theoretical explanations as to why things are the way they are among hip-hop generationers and what should be done about it. I have taken great pains—in some ways going against my institutional training as a student of the Birmingham School cultural-studies tradition—to avoid overstating the "subaltern" or "oppositional" character of Bay Area hip-hop while at the same time doing justice to the irrepressible, oftentimes audacious and subversive aspects of the scene as well as the resilience and ingenuity of its actors.

To reiterate, I have argued that imposing a theoretical framework overstating hip-hop's counterhegemonic qualities would be to obscure the undeniable fact that the majority of rap artists and their associates are motivated by the most mainstream of capitalistic preoccupations; they are among the most entrepreneurially savvy "rugged individualists" on the American cultural scene. In the world of hip-hop, money and the desire for social mobility matter just as much as (if not more than) musical transcendence or grassroots movement building. Just because MCs and rap producers work within a popular form often perceived as culturally transgressive does not mean they are not trying to capitalize—quite literally—on that fact. While this may make some hard-line neo-Marxists squirm, denying this reality would be to lapse into what are, frankly, neocolonialist stereotypes that frame urban youth subcultures much like the supposedly isolated indigenous tribes and remote villages of early anthropological writing, where the

figure of the brown-skinned native, the "noble savage" who is unspoiled by the mechanisms of industry, represents not so much ethnographic realities as a desire among anthropologists and folklorists to escape the alienating conditions of modernity.

Rather than think of Bay Area hip-hop as a discretely bounded subculture (Abu-Lughod 1991)—mapping outdated anthropological concepts of culture onto a contemporary a cultural formation—it must be viewed in relational terms at the global-local nexus. James Clifford provides a useful conceptualization of local cultures in his invocation of the homonym "roots" and "routes" (1997), implying how the actual lived experience of culture is informed simultaneously by the specificity of place and the broad circulation of forms. This is an expansion on Clifford's earlier notion of "traveling cultures" (1992). Emphasizing travel helps account for the sense of dynamism, movement, and migration within and between cultural formations—migrations of bodies, commodities, expressions, ideas, traditions, practices, and institutions that have come to characterize the globalized late-capitalist phase of history: "If we rethink culture and its science, anthropology, in terms of travel, then the organic, naturalizing bias of the term culture—seen a s a rooted body that grows, lives, dies, etc.—is questioned. Constructed and disputed *historicities*, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view" (1992:101).

Far from static or isolated, local subcultures exist in relation to broader structural realities such as deindustrialization, "war on youth" disciplinary tactics, corporate conglomeration, and the neoliberal state. Of particular interest in the case of Bay Area hip-hop is its position within a broader "mediascape" (Appadurai 1990) dominated by multinational entertainment companies, which provide the primary circuits through which

hip-hop flows. But it does not flow freely. As most of the interviewees consulted here are quick to point out, access to these channels is not granted equally and wealth is not distributed evenly throughout. These are the political-economic dynamics Bay Area rap artists work in and against as they attempt to gain widespread visibility while still maintaining local connections.

Examining the Bay's local cultural production in relation to the global cultural industries disrupts the political-economic and racial supposition that hip-hop is and can only be, on the one hand, authentic black street-based culture indigenous to the American inner city or, on the other and, a co-opted commodity form produced by a monolithic white-supremacist "culture industry." The Bay Area scene complicates and confounds what I call this hip-hop "master narrative," with its tinge of loss and the elegiac: that hip-hop was once a pure realm of subversive expression among African Americans but has been taken over by Anglo corporate interests. Local hip-hop for decades has served as a vibrant alternative sphere for black youth to define their identities and sense of place in the world, oftentimes in opposition to the broader institutional forces that work to marginalize them. But at the same time those very same hip-hoppers have sought to harness those forces—particularly market forces—in order to empower themselves, attract new audiences, and put their cities and 'hoods "on blast" (i.e. place their communities on the rap industry's mattering map). In this sense, hip-hoppers "dance with the devil"—those bedeviling, vexing forces of capital—as Jose Limón's consultants do in his study of working-class Mexican immigrants contending with Anglo-Texas dominant culture (1994). And in the case of Bay Area hip-hop, those dancers are not always African American. They may be Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, or even white.

Examining hip-hop within a specific, regionally delineated community from an ethnographic point of view reveals how hip-hop's role in American life is much more nuanced and complex than the hip-hop master narrative would suggest. It is neither a pure vernacular expression of an oppressed minority class nor is it merely a cultural commodity imposed upon consumers and alienated from producers. In the Bay Area, hip-hop "heads" simultaneously consume mass-produced rap while adapting hip-hop's elements to produce a homespun variant with unique forms of music, dance, slang, street fashion, and folklore—the stories locals tell about themselves, their peers, and their relationship to the social environment. Attending to the local in hip-hop uncovers the inventive ways Bay Area "heads" construct individual and group identities that register primarily in expressive, affective terms. These novel cultural identities exceed rigid social markers of race, gender, and class; more specifically, they challenge the widely held perception that hip-hop is solely the terrain of inner-city young African-American men. Although being black, male, and from the 'hood certainly inheres cultural capital in the Bay Area (as it does just about anywhere hip-hop is practiced), membership in this community is not overdetermined by those factors. More fundamentally, a sense of belonging is engendered through localized modes of expression and embodied style that manifest through shared practices, discourses, texts, symbols, locales, and imaginaries.

As with all ethnographies, this is a case study of how culture works in one specific place during one specific historical moment. As Arjun Appadurai points out, "more than any of the other human sciences, anthropology is based on circumstantial evidence" (1988:16), making it therefore difficult to draw broadly generalizeable conclusions from fieldwork findings. This is especially true in examining Bay Area hip-

hop, given its reputation as a distinctive, eccentric, unconventional regional subculture. Nevertheless, I view it as more than mere anomaly or epiphenomenon. Rather, it is a vanguard manifestation of significant shifts in American social relations and global cultural production. These include the increasingly multiracial and multiethnic composition of U.S. inner cities, where blacks, Latinos, and Asians often inhabit the same spaces; the attenuated social and economic marginalization of urban working-class youth, who increasingly have to organize in order to demand better life opportunities; and the widespread availability of new digital technologies that enable ordinary folks to produce and circulate their own media and circumvent corporations.

Focusing on the local reveals the impact of these broad social and economic forces in specific cultural contexts. This study demonstrates the compatibility of anthropological and cultural-studies theories and methods for generating new understandings of popular culture as lived practice. Rather than draw speculative conclusions, this study illustrates the inventive ways social agents within a given community engage with popular forms not in the abstract but on the ground, as they navigate cultural formations "structured in dominance," to use Stuart Hall's term (1996). And the Bay Area hip-hop scene is useful "ground" to cover because it provides a unique instantiation of some of the most vexing and intriguing aspects of postindustrial, postmodern cultural production. It offers a concrete manifestation of some of the key problematics foregrounded in contemporary cultural theory, including post-positivist critiques of anthropology that emphasize the dialogic and often dissonant workings of culture (Clifford 1988; Marcus & Fisher 1986); debates within British and American cultural studies on the tensions between notions of creative media consumption—or

"active audiences"—and the homogenizing tendencies of the cultural industries (Chambers 1985; Fiske 1989; Morley 1993); and postcolonial analyses of the complex, contentious relationship between local civil societies or "counterpublics" and national or global neoliberal interests (Anderson 1983; Appadurai 1990; Fraser 1990; Hardt & Negri 2001; Scott 1990; Warner 2002). This project provides a glimpse into how those theories take shape "on the ground" and will perhaps help further "ground" those theories.

In a sense, the cultural "data" provided here and the analysis I have drawn from it present just the starting point for further investigation and elaborated theorizing about hip-hop's poetics and cultural politics as well as emergent American racial dynamics of the kind documented here. As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, current theory about both racial formation and popular culture provides a somewhat impoverished framework for tracking the dynamic and essentially unstable meanings indexed by the terms "race" and "the popular." The task at hand as I further pursue this research topic is to push the key lines of inquiry introduced here into more sustained and in-depth analyses and, perhaps in doing so, to generate new theory, much as John L. Jackson was able to develop extremely useful and astute theorizations around the notion of "racial sincerity" in *Real Black* (2005), the more theoretically elaborated follow-up to his ethnographic work, *Harlemworld* (2003), the book based upon his own dissertation research.

As with Jackson, race will continue to provide the central focus for further analysis of Bay Area hip-hop, given its fluidity in this particular setting and my suggestion that this very fluidity and indeterminacy—although difficult to study because it is so hard to "pin down"—is the most significant finding here, from which

generalizations about how race works in America can be made. In future writing, I will pursue the same general question of how race matters in subtly shifting hip-hop contexts (between the two “camps,” in spaces marked quite clearly as “black,” and, likewise, in spaces where blackness is conspicuously downplayed or absent) but attempt to develop a clearer rubric or “yardstick” to evaluate these meaningful movements. This requires me to answer some fundamental questions left hanging here; namely, what exactly do I mean by “race”? Is it possible to define? If, as I posit throughout, race is fluid, dynamic, cultural, and performative, then how do I assess when something “racial” is occurring and when race recedes into the background? When does it intensify, come into view, and make its presence known and when does it not seem to matter? Or does it always matter? Moreover, if race is not so much an object or a “thing” as it is a sum of forces (cultural, social, economic, political), then is there a way to assess which ones are operational more than others in certain settings?

I imagine a useful way to assess how race matters will be to examine it in terms of who has freedom to move, traverse, negotiate, invent, and pursue “novelty” (novel cultural productions, novel racial identities, etc.) and who is hemmed in by constraints, both social and spatial. The latter includes racialized stereotypes that fix identities, such as the figures of the “mack” and the “hustler,” which are overdetermined as black and seem to be the only models of masculinity inhering much cultural capital among young men occupying ‘hoodspace. I will explore the ways in which ‘hoodspace itself is an area of creativity within tremendous constraints where blackness is at once the “prestige” racial location; by contrast, once one steps outside its spaces and logics and into the broader public sphere, blackness contributes to the marking young African Americans as

suspect, troubled, out of control, etc. In many cases, blackness literally blocks physical movement in the sense that poor African-American youth are constantly surveilled, frequently targeted for disciplinary intervention, and rarely have the means of to be socioeconomically mobile and physically mobile in terms of travel to other 'hoods, cities, regions, and areas of the globe. Conversely, hip-hop actors outside 'hoodspace's "hardcore" social realms are far more cosmopolitan; the lion's share of backpacker hip-hop circulates internationally in the form of global niche-market record sales and concert-tour circuits spanning U.S. college towns and overseas (especially Europe and Japan). It is no coincidence that many Bay Area backpacker artists are white, Asian-American, from middle-class backgrounds, and are mobile in every sense of the word.

In addition to developing a more specific conceptualization or measure of how race matters in shifting contexts, I also want to pursue a more in-depth analysis of capital, markets, commodification, and exchange as elements of circulatory systems where far more culturally generative activity is occurring than can be explained within neo-Marxian cultural-studies frameworks. Such analytical schema always seem to interpret popular culture—because it is by definition enmeshed in the circuits of capital—within a "hermeneutic of suspicion" (Sedgwick 1997) loaded with value judgments about capitalist modes of production as inherently alienated or corrupting. Is there another way of reading activities such as "out the trunk" guerilla marketing and hand-to-hand sales—and the whole host of creative and entrepreneurial endeavors animated by this art-and-labor ethic—beyond what literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick characterizes as the "paranoid" stance implicit in prevailing (Marxian and Freudian) theorizations of social power (1997)? Surely there are more kinetic and passionate forms of cultural commerce

occurring in the settings I described here, to which terms such as “resistance,” “domination,” “cooptation,” and “false consciousness” do not fully do justice. Can the intensely local and grassroots forms of capitalist “cultural traffic” (K. Jackson 2005) of the kind described here also rightly be framed as anti-capitalist, or at least anti-neoliberal in the sense that multinational corporations play little to no direct role in such activities? Is there a way to broaden concepts of “capital” into more expansive, metaphoric, and dynamic theoretical frames—perhaps by developing more active verbalizations of the term: to “capitalize,” and/or “capitalizing”? Such are the trajectories to be explored in future work on the subject of Bay Area hip-hop, a rich research site rife with the potential to inspire novel theorizations.

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Vita

Amanda Maria Morrison was born in Los Angeles in 1975. After graduating from Santa Rosa High School in California, she attended the University of California at Santa Cruz, where she graduated in 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. From 1998 until 2001, she worked in San Francisco as an editor for the online arts-and-entertainment and city guide, Citysearch.com. She has also contributed articles on music and the arts to *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*, the *Oakland Tribune*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and the *Austin American-Statesman*. In 2002, she entered graduate studies in the Folklore and Public Culture Program in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin.

Permanent address: 1818 King Street, Santa Rosa, CA 95404

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