

CASH RULES EVERYTHING AROUND ME: THE HIGH PRICE OF SUSTAINING  
HIP-HOP COMMUNITY IN CHICAGO

BY

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Cash Rules Everything Around Me: The High Price of Sustaining a Hip-Hop Community  
in Chicago

This dissertation, entitled “Cash Rules Everything Around Me (CREAM): The High Price of Sustaining a Hip-Hop Community in Chicago,” contributes to the literature on hip-hop and culture by providing an ethnographic study on the various ways that those who defined themselves as being hip-hop go about constructing this identity in light of the unique socioeconomic challenges that all Americans are experiencing in these uncertain economic times. A sub-cultural cooption through consumer capitalism has forced those who want to be part of hip-hop subculture to go back underground. But to label all of these individuals merely “underground” would be as equally uninformative as labeling anyone who wears baggy blue jeans and can rhyme words together as being “hip-hop.” With so much confusion and misappropriation of the culture, it appears urgently necessary to take a more academic examination of exactly what this hip-hop thing is, who is authentically hip-hop and how membership in this community is defined.

“Cash Rules Everything Around Me” contrasts the Hip-Hop Nation with the Rap Industrial Complex, which presents stereotyped caricatures of hip-hop culture. A central argument of this dissertation is that neoliberalism is one of the more significant contributing factors that explains the slow encroachment of the Rap Industrial Complex where it is often mistakenly blurred with hip-hop. This dissertation separates the two and reveals several complex layers to each medium. I present how these layered identities of the Hip-Hop Nation are being undermined by consumer capitalism much like has already occurred within the Rap Industrial Complex. My nine months of field research in Chicago revealed that five major identities emerged among my research participants who are categorized as the Hip-Hop Nation: *Professional Headz*, *Refugee Headz*, *Hip-Hop Fundamentalists*, *Black Headz* and *Tech Headz*. These identities were characterized by the personal values that my participants indicated were most reaffirmed through hip-hop culture. At present, however, my findings in this dissertation lead me to conclude that the high cost of participating collectively in hip-hop has made it increasingly difficult to, in fact, call my Chicago respondents a hip-hop “community” more than it is a collection of individuals. One major contributing factor to this breakdown in community are the individual edicts of neoliberalism that has informed hip-hop identities and behaviors in three important ways.

Neoliberal ideology has helped to facilitate the decreasing space in which hip-hop headz can gather, it makes progressive outlets more costly and it forces many of my participants into an individualistic, survival of the fittest mentality. A central premise that this research works on is that as the cost of living has gone up in other areas of American life, so has the cost of being hip-hop. Hip-hop originally thrived on public participation but in big cities like Chicago over the last 30 years, public space –like many things- has been privatized in the neoliberal belief that the market knows best. These commercial limitations on the collective experiencing of hip-hop culture in Chicago is particularly troubling among my respondents because they are overwhelmingly more educated than the general population. If hip-hop’s supposed best and brightest can’t afford to kick it, then who can? What does this say about hip-hop? What does this say about the future of the American dream? “CREAM” provides some answers.

**Representing**

Carlita  
Hilda  
Ronny  
Kerry  
Corey  
Geovonny  
Marc  
Ryan  
Darryl  
Aramis  
Jacqueline  
Hank  
Jeff  
Alfonso  
Scott  
Derek  
Neil  
Felicia  
Read  
Erica  
Mike  
Kouske  
C.C.  
Carlos  
Bobbi

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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION TO THE HIP-HOP NATION

### Introduction

“I live this shit!” Alfonso tells me as he diligently crumbles a palm full of marijuana into dust. “I live this shit” he repeats for emphasis. Alfonso is a hip-hop *MC* (master of ceremonies) of several years. He, and many of those who I label in my dissertation as *professional headz* in my nine months of field research on Chicago hip-hop, made it a point to distinguish themselves from *rappers* who didn’t really live according to values that he feels are representative of authentic hip-hop culture. Rappers rhyme because rapping is viewed as a highly rewarding, marketable skill. However possessing this skill, in the view of Alfonso and most of my other 24 research participants, does not necessarily make a rapper part of the larger community that I refer to throughout this paper as the *Hip-Hop Nation*. This community that I study ethnographically for nine months in Chicago defined themselves in contrast to those who exclusively engage hip-hop at the commodity level. On one side of this spectrum stands self-professed MC’s such as Alfonso who made it clear to me that while they felt that they should be well compensated for their craft, their placement within the culture of hip-hop distinguished them from rappers who were exclusively concerned with how they can make money off of rap music. MC’s, as my research participants described them, attempt to make a larger contribution to all aspects of hip-hop culture even if it isn’t profitable. 32-year-old Alfonso feels that it is crucial to establish the difference between true purveyors of the subculture like himself who have given blood, sweat and tears for hip-hop culture and those who are just along for the ride until the money runs out, saying:

(Hip-hop nation) means a lot to me. It's not a broad scale term. The actual Hip-Hop Nation is a small collective of hip-hop itself. A lot of people say they're in the Hip-Hop Nation, but they're not. A lot of people are looking like a nation member, sounding like a nation member and they ain't. It's a lot of people in the Hip-Hop Nation who are in power to see it fall. It means a lot to me cause I live this shit. I live this shit! With no conviction, no stutter! I live this shit! I understand it. I'm fighting for it. I'm doing it. I live it. Soon as I leave here I'm going to the studio. When I leave the studio, I'm going to work on my show, think about my songs. When I'm washing my motherfucking body I'm gone have a beat in my head and scrubbing my underarm to some rap. On my way to work, I'm gone think of some lyrics and write them down in the middle of driving. I'm gone spit that shit and think of new shit while I'm driving. When I go to work it's to finance it. When I turn on my computer, I turn my music back on. When I'm at work I use the jargon, I use the humor. I used what I learned from it to bridge gaps in between us. I live this shit!

But "Cash Rules Everything Around Me" (CREAM) argues that the economic reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century life for young, black Americans like Alfonso is that exactly how much you can "live this shit" is highly dependent on your socioeconomic positioning. Like everything else in America, being able to live according to the hip-hop values identified in my fieldwork has become increasingly difficult if you don't have money to spend. I hypothesize that today's labor market conditions have made it where individuals who say they reject the commercial aspects of, what I call here; *The Rap Industrial Complex*, are finding it difficult to participate in hip-hop culture in ways that are collectively progressive. Recent shifts in western capitalism over the past 30 years have called for people to find more personalized solutions to challenges in areas of life that are generally taken care of by the federal government in other industrialized societies. This is particularly true in inner-cities which have historically been the epicenter of the Hip-Hop Nation. (Castleman 1982, Forman 2000) I argue here that, on multiple levels, this process of relying on the private sector has been transferred into both the public representation of hip-hop culture as well as how it informs the experiences of individuals in Chicago who largely base their identities in contrast to those public representations.

*Hip-hop headz* in this dissertation contrast themselves from those who they feel pervert hip-hop culture through their exclusive focus on commercial interests. My 25 respondents were similar in that almost all said that hip-hop culture had a responsibility for the uplift of working-class people, they were black and they all were over 25-years old. Some other universal values of the Hip-Hop Nation included a devotion to present a unified front in spite of many nuanced differences within the subculture. One of the more significant universal values found amongst every category of Hip-Hop Head was a devotion to what I define as collective individuality. The fostering of unique forms of personal, individual expression is one of the most attractive characteristics that attracts people to hip-hop. But it is essential, not only that these individuals have room for expression, but that this is done in a shared space where some of the values that inform their expression can be reaffirmed. The Hip-Hop Nation in my interviews and observations also demonstrated an intense commitment to knowledge, but knowledge that had some form of utility. So in this way street knowledge is valued equally with academic curriculum, and often times more so. The Hip-Hop Nation drew some parallels to neoliberal capitalism in regard to the community's valuing of the spirit of competition and self-entrepreneurship. However, these values are working from a different historical perspective than the entrepreneurial model celebrated by proponents of western capitalism. For example, rather than viewing capitalism as a mechanism to secure material excess, the Hip-Hop Nation values entrepreneurialship as necessary for their very survival. Additionally, this spirit of enterprise is related to the cultural value of self-determination. This speaks to a belief that individuals should be most instrumental in choosing the identity that they take on, as opposed to conforming to socially accepted

identities like those outside of the Hip-Hop Nation. This was perhaps most eloquently phrased by one participant who referred to such individuals as “good negroes.” But the only way to fully avoid being a good negro on some level was to being economically independent. And when I observed competition on the microphone or in the b-boy circle, it was competition that was aimed at collective growth of the subculture, not to be used merely as a winner-take-all manner in which to measure individual merit. Finally, one of the consistent themes in the literature on hip-hop, my fieldwork and my lyrical analysis is that hip-hop is rooted in working class experiences. (McLaren 1995, Dimitriadis 1996)

The hyper-consumerism inherent in contemporary rap music has presented some public representations of hip-hop that differ greatly with some of the principles that my participants said attracted them to the culture in the first place. These images have evolved so far away from these guiding principles of hip-hop culture that they are more properly categorized under what I have defined as the *Rap Industrial Complex*. I coined the term Rap Industrial Complex to refer to all the various enterprises that have been created and expanded by using rap music as a mechanism to exploit black culture for profit, that is not reinvested in the communities that made the profit possible. In this manner, radio stations, MTV, and record companies like Virgin are part of the Rap Industrial Complex. But this also includes other corporations that have worked inside of the nexus of the Rap Industrial Complex, such as Nike, who have used rap music to get kids to buy their shoes or bottled water companies that have rappers endorse their products. Simply, the Rap Industrial Complex consists of those enterprises that work to profit from hip-hop culture without having any connection with hip-hop outside of its use for commodity. I reference rap here because in popular media it is the only form of hip-

hop expression that's given any amount of traction. The other three elements of hip-hop culture such as DJ'ing, graffiti and breakdancing are more difficult to mainstream for consumers, so they are not included as often in the Rap Industrial Complex.

Consequently, many newcomers view the products of the rap music industry as the only viable representations of hip-hop culture. Walker reminds us that it would be a mistake to view hip-hop culture through the prism of rap alone, writing, "rap is by no means the sum total of the hip-hop experience and never should be mistaken as such. Truth be told, rap is one of the later forms of expression colonized by the hip-hop community." (Walker 2003, 120) Furthermore, the kind of rap that is frequently made most accessible for commercial consumption over the past decade is not that which is rooted in the core principles of the Hip-Hop Nation that I discovered in my field work, but instead disseminates images and messages that promote the goals of the Rap Industrial Complex.

Before 1992, hip-hop was largely ignored by mainstream commercial entities such as MTV, The Grammy's and Top 40 radio. Hip-hop was so obscure in 1989 that the genre's first Grammy was awarded under the cover of darkness, as DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince's (aka Will Smith) award for "Parents Just Don't Understand" was not placed in the broadcast portion of the show. This move was greeted with a mass boycott of the Grammy's by several hip-hop artists, demonstrating the chasm between the hip-hop community and the music industry. While there were some rap artists that broke through commercially such as Hammer and Vanilla Ice, who both were universally rejected by the hip-hop community, it wasn't until 1991 that an artist respected within hip-hop enjoyed commercial success that rivaled pop and country music. The Rap Industrial Complex would receive the fuel for its ignition when Dr. Dre came out of

seemingly nowhere to totally change popular music. With little media buzz and virtually no radio play before its rise up the charts, Dr. Dre's 1992 album, *The Chronic* went on to sell over 4 million records worldwide. Considered a cute fad previously, *The Chronic* forced the record industry to take a closer look at rap music's commercial viability. This resulted in major, white-owned record labels and distributors; that had almost exclusively focused on rock & pop music previously, beginning to take an interest in hip-hop. One of the more lucrative beneficiaries was Interscope Records executive Jimmy Iovine, a middle class white man who is about as un hip-hop as they come. His partnership with the independent hip-hop label, Death Row Records, turned Iovine's fledgling company into a major music industry player overnight. Other entrepreneurs saw Iovine's example and began to milk this new and unexpected cash cow. This process caused many labels to attempt to reproduce the originally authentic sound and imagery of Dre and Snoop featured on *The Chronic* and try and sell this to the masses. While the visual has shifted from the gangsta posture of the early 1990s to the present-day materialistic, hedonistic zip coon dandy (chapter five); from this period onward, much of hip-hop's public persona has been crafted by those who have not paid their dues within the hip-hop community by investing time to hone their craft, which is quite unlike the experiences of the research respondents that I spoke with who said paying your dues within hip-hop was vital. Previously, having some credibility within the hip-hop community was essential, which is why most of the leading rap labels of the day such as Def Jam and Delicious Vinyl focused exclusively on hip-hop music. The Rap Industrial Complex has made these kind of attachments in hip-hop less of a requirement as labels such as Interscope easily began

to maneuver between Enrique Iglesias, The Pussycat Dolls and Tupac without batting an eye.

This dissertation makes an original contribution by drawing some observable contrasts between the highly contradictory binaries of what I call the *Hip Hop Nation* and the *Rap Industrial Complex*. Hip hop clearly needs some levels of consumer capitalism to reproduce itself, but when the Hip-Hop Nation originally engaged with capitalism this was done in an effort to rework capitalism to allow it to become more inclusive – particularly for inner city black youth. The Rap Industrial Complex has no such ambivalence in regard to consumerism and accepts consumer capitalism at face value.

As scholars on culture (Hebdige 1979, Baudrillard 1994, Featherstone 2007) have suggested elsewhere, this process of cooption through consumption in the Rap Industrial Complex has forced those who want to be part of the hip-hop subculture to go back underground. But to label all of these individuals in the underground merely “hip-hop” would be as equally uninformative as labeling anyone who wears baggy blue jeans and can rhyme words together as being hip-hop. My nine months of field research in Chicago revealed that five major identities emerged among my research participants: *Professional Headz*, *Refugee Headz*, *Hip-Hop Fundamentalists*, *Black Headz* and *Tech Headz*. These identities were characterized by the personal values that my participants indicated were most reaffirmed through hip-hop culture.

This dissertation contributes to the literature on hip-hop by providing an ethnographic study on how the Hip-Hop Nation defines itself. Another one of the major goals of “CREAM” is to explore the various ways that those who defined themselves as being hip-hop go about constructing this identity in light of the unique socioeconomic

challenges that all Americans are experiencing in these uncertain economic times where the United States is transitioning away from the influence of neoliberal capitalism, which has been predominant in American political-economy for almost three decades. While it is certainly difficult to measure the effect that *neoliberalism* has had on my participants' lives overall, a section of this dissertation is framed in a discussion of how neoliberalism has impacted the Hip-Hop Nation's use of public space. In this regard, "CREAM" also attempts to examine how the Hip-Hop Nation specifically is adjusting to how the role of government has changed in America from a Keynesian to a neoliberal model since the late 1970s. This point is particularly significant for the black participants that make up my study because the Keynesian model was so vital to black empowerment during the Civil Rights era. One of the central arguments that this dissertation rests on is that this federal rollback in services, to the poor in particular, influences how hip-hop culture is lived, formed and experienced. Finally, this dissertation also examines the ways in which limited access to capital has strained these individuals' ability to form a community that is grounded in hip-hop values.

There have been many scholarly accounts that have identified hip-hop culture as the preeminent counterculture in the United States since the late 1970s. (Rose 1994, Lipsitz 1994, McClaren 1995) During this period, the predominant philosophy of mainstream American life has been the socioeconomic philosophy of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, which will be discussed in greater depth in my literature review (chapter 4), has been a movement that gained prominence in the United States in the mid 1970s after the stagflation crisis that saw this economic calamity as being largely the result of generations-long mismanagement of federal dollars. (Pieterse 2004, Harvey 2003, Peck

2007) During this period, crystallized politically by the Reagan Revolution, it became widely agreed upon in the West that the best way to avert this crisis in the future was to limit government's role in improving the life of the individual. This perverted form of capitalism differed dramatically with the Keynesian model of capitalism that was the standard since the Great Depression. This neoliberal view called for a renewed liberation of markets and felt that individual social improvement could best be realized by turning to the private sector. But with such generous government intervention recently, it seems clear that we are in the middle of a major ideological shift similar to what we saw in the mid 1970s so it is important to document some of the impacts of this new (and not so improved) end of history. The Hip-Hop Nation in my fieldwork has responded to these changes by taking on more social responsibility for themselves. But "CREAM" concludes now what Keynes did over half a century ago, that these individualized measures can only go so far if a collective society is to be maintained that allows the luxury of individualism. The same is true for a collective subculture.

What Keat and Abercrombie have referred to as the *enterprise culture* of neoliberalism has overtaken the founding values of hip-hop culture in many important ways. (Keat and Abercrombie 1991) With unprecedented levels of materialistic glorification in rap music, it is clear that there are many rappers who believe that the market is indeed a worthy marker of social status (chapter five), a view that was repeatedly rejected by my research respondents in Chicago. While hip-hop—a culture that only has received any mainstream traction after it proved itself viable in the marketplace through music, film, fashion, etc- has always had some reliance on the market, literature on hip-hop culture showed that those who self-identified with the culture frequently

sought collective measures of social progress. In this tradition hip-hop songs such as Public Enemy's "9-1-1 is a Joke" is rooted in the collective experience of neglect by the healthcare system in America. In similar fashion, when black-on-black violence spiraled out of control the hip-hop community collectively organized within by mobilizing the "Stop the Violence" and "We're All in the Same Gang" movements in the late 1980s. And the Hip-Hop Nation may have been its most unified when its collective free speech was being challenged in the 1990 obscenity case of Broward County vs. The 2 Live Crew where members of the Miami-based rap group were briefly imprisoned for violating Florida's obscenity law. The hip-hop community saw this not just as a trial against an individual rap group, but as a persecution (and prosecution) of hip-hop's collective voice and identity. Collective social progress was by most all accounts the standard in early hip-hop, as opposed to measuring progress through individualistic markers. (Cross 1993, Dimitriadis 1996) Hip-hop pioneer Grandmaster Flash demonstrates the absence of an individualized profit-motive among most old-school hip-hop headz, saying, "I was approached in '77. A gentleman walked up to me and said, "We can put what you're doing on record." I would have to admit that I was blind. I didn't think that somebody else would want to hear a record re-recorded onto another record with talking on it. I didn't think it would reach the masses like that. I didn't see it." (Dimitradis 1996, 179) It was far more important for DJ's like Grandmaster Flash, and rappers like Melly Mel, to secure collective respect from their local communities, rather than receive adulation from those who had long turned their backs on impoverished communities like the South Bronx neighborhood where hip-hop originated. Headz contend that those who relate to

the RIC *only* consider profit and wouldn't participate in the rap element of hip-hop culture otherwise.

However, my dissertation research found that the economic realities of the last two decades are causing the Hip-Hop Nation to become detached from this collective framework. Fitzsimons says that these values of collectivism and communal responsibility described by my research participants work in opposition to how western, neoliberal *enterprise cultures* have been constructed, writing:

The task of constructing an enterprise/neoliberal culture means two things. Firstly, a large range of institutions need to be remodeled along the lines of commercial enterprises including its orientation to the demands of the consumer. Second, there needs to be a sustained attempt to neutralize and reverse all those tendencies within society that are inimical to the "spirit of enterprise." At the heart of the enterprise is a cultural perspective where the autonomous self is prioritized and where specific individual competitive values are esteemed. It is a very different form of capitalism from the economic cultures that function in collectivist modes. Enterprise culture then, demands continual reconstruction of self but the individual response is largely shaped in its possibilities and rate of response. The type of information made available and the type of access to it shape the possibility of individual response. (Fitzsimmons 2002, 4)

One of the leading scholars who has described how this process has played out in the urban context is David Wilson (2006) who has identified institutions such as inner-city schools, entitlement programs, housing and even its prisons as being disproportionately influenced by neoliberal policies in cities such as Chicago specifically. Wilson's work on Chicago, and other scholarly contributors to neoliberalism, are discussed in greater detail in chapter three. In similar fashion to how Wilson describes the local public sector, The Rap Industrial Complex has been one such institution that has been remodeled in this way, as increasingly the primary consideration has been what's best for business, not what's best for the people who hip-hop culture is to represent. Furthermore, the literature (Rose 1994, Kitwana 2003, George 2005, Chang 2005) shows

that hip-hop emerged from a tradition where it held the government responsible for the conditions of the marginalized who served as hip-hop's original constituency, as well as having a responsibility for improving these conditions. This perspective is vastly at odds with a neoliberalism that positions government as what's holding individuals back, not as an entity that can be positioned to help solve their problems.

Hip-hop has responded to this commercial reality, that has accelerated worldwide since the fall of the Soviet Union, by creating many astounding pockets of entrepreneurial wealth from the likes of Jay-Z, Master P and Diddy (or whoever he is this week). But if my participants' experiences and observations are to be any judge, this has not trickled down to the rank-and-file hip-hop head. In fact, much research says that most of this wealth created by hip-hop is not being recycled into the black community. (Associated Content, 2009) Of greater concern to my participants, however, is that many companies that have had no affiliation with hip-hop culture have successfully generated revenue through messages processed through the Rap Industrial Complex. For example, Tanqueray Gin's sales went up 10 percent in 1994, the year that Snoop Dogg released his hit "Gin and Juice." Absolut Spirits executives went one step further in capitalizing off of the song's popularity and actually created a pre-mixed Seagram's brand of gin & juice that was largely marketed to inner-city youth. (Hughes 2002) Additionally, what was particularly unique about hip-hop in its early years was that it did not require extreme wealth to participate. My dissertation research found that this is not true as much anymore as the cost of participating in public life has risen dramatically in all facets of America. So it is not totally shocking that this is occurring within hip-hop as well, as many of my participants said that the rising costs of concerts, music and technology has

not been met with a subsequent rise in income. Live Nation and Ticketmaster promote almost all of the concerts in all music genres across the United States, and the companies' quasi-monopoly has allowed them to hike up ticket fees dramatically, altering the accessibility of hip-hop headz. Charging fees that range from 18 to 20 percent of the total ticket price, Live Nation CEO Nathan Hubbard justified jacking up a \$60 concert ticket to \$75 by saying, "In many cases, we are losing money at the door because of the money we pay to the artist – and subsidizing it in other ways." (Knopper, 2009) While this point can't be verified, the fact that the public spaces for collectively experiencing hip-hop are being priced out is made worse because many rappers who were originally among the harshest critics of these outside, commercial interests in hip-hop now are some of the Rap Industrial Complex's best spokespersons.

One explanation for this shift that was offered repeatedly by professional headz was that there is not sufficient market demand for images and values that differ with those that reinforce this ideology that the free market provides the best solutions to what ails black America. At the same time, this has occurred in a period where labor competition has become even more heightened for young black males. With few outlets through other mediums, it just does not make good market sense for MC's to sell metaphorical cashews when there is a high demand for walnuts. This process is sending the Hip-Hop Nation into an every woman, man and child for their self-type mentality where habits of individualism inform the way that hip-hop is lived both above ground in the Rap Industrial Complex and below ground in the Hip Hop Nation. There is money to be made in making odes to materialism, not as much in making songs about unemployment, police brutality or underperforming schools. But these individualized

commercial successes have had a high cost for the collective identities of the Hip-Hop Nation and black youths in general. Most of my participants were like Alfonso in that they tried to construct their own identities in contrast to how black hip- hoppers are portrayed in the Rap Industrial Complex.

My 25 research participants fell into five general categories: the aforementioned *professional headz*, *black headz*, *refugee headz*, *tech headz* and *hip-hop fundamentalists*. While each group of participants said they had varying aspects of their identity reinforced by their placement within the spaces of the Hip-Hop Nation, each identity finds itself battling for autonomy. My findings that rugged, capitalistic individualism would be promoted in mainstream popular culture is less surprising considering some of the conclusions reached in studies on the evolution of culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Adorno 1949, Hebdige 1979, Muggleton 2000) But if we find similar patterns even among those who defined their boundaries within hip-hop by rejecting these mainstream values then this would be very telling indeed for the progression of hip-hop culture and black people in America who use this culture to inform their identity.

We have already discussed professional headz such as Alfonso who opened this paper. *Professional headz* view the Hip-Hop Nation as a space where they can find sustainable employment. Additionally these jobs offer more spontaneity and space for personal expression than what these respondents feel are available in traditional work. This differs from the rapper who works under a very predictable, formulaic format that will be described in greater detail later in chapters five and six. These rappers are what Russell Simmons has referred to as “glorified employees” of the Rap Industrial Complex. Glorified in that sometimes they are awarded a high salary for their craft, but much like

one of my participants said, are fully disposable after they have exhausted their usefulness, akin to a candy wrapper. My research participants said that they are unwilling to follow the capitalist edict championed by rapper 50 Cent of get rich or die trying. The professional headz in my study imagined themselves as being unwilling to compromise their hip-hop principles and integrity for a few dollars more. But a closer analysis reveals that much like the glorified employees of the Rap Industrial Complex, pro headz are not quite as free as they imagine themselves to be.

One of the more appealing aspects of hip-hop during the period that many of my participants came of age was that it provided them a space where they could feel comfort in their blackness. The Afrocentricity in hip-hop culture places blacks in the center, far different from the relationship that young black people have enjoyed historically with America. Members of the Hip-Hop Nation who have their identities reaffirmed by having a space where they can see their black culture and history presented in a more positive light are labeled as *black headz* in this work. Hip-hop music has long provided the soundtrack for a variety of subjects relevant to the black experience. Without question, a conscious effort has been made throughout the music's history to educate, and reaffirm to the public, of black contributions to humanity. Groups such as Poor Righteous Teachers, Brand Nubian, X-Clan, Public Enemy and even the white group, Third Bass, made it a point to counterbalance one-dimensional portrayals of the African diaspora in media and textbooks by expanding black imaginations beyond slavery more than it ever had been in such an accessible medium as hip-hop music. Felicia and Neil were among many participants who credit the Hip-Hop Nation, and activists like Afrika Bambaataa and Queen Latifah, in giving them an Afrocentric view of the world that saw the global

contributions of black people recognized and celebrated. This identity is contrasted in the Rap Industrial Complex by what some have deemed the minstrel rapper who, like his blackface predecessor in the ante-bellum period, perpetuates black stereotypes to maintain the political and economic status quo. Both black headz and the modern-day minstrel of the Rap Industrial Complex are discussed in depth in chapters five and six respectively.

*Hip-hop fundamentalists* are highly critical of the way that hip-hop has evolved away from principles associated with collective, political activism. One of the primary ways that they differ from the black headz is that hip-hop fundamentalists are far more open to the cultural diversity of hip-hop, even seeing the spaces carved out for hip-hop as a meeting point for the various races. While the Fundamentalists are open racially, they are far less flexible in regard to what cultural practices that white, black, Latino and Asian kids can engage in within the borders of the Hip-Hop Nation. Like orthodox members of any faith, hip-hop fundamentalists are resistant to change within the culture and feel that the core principles should not deviate far from those laid down in 1973 when Kool Herc is credited with birthing the culture. This group of research respondents were also highly critical of those who claimed a hip-hop identity but were unaware of its rich, historical tradition. Hip-hop fundamentalists were said to be drawn to its tradition, values and standards for decorum in an ever-changing world where identities shift rapidly. Like Christians in the Baptist South, or Islamic fundamentalists in the Middle East, many of these participants are clinging mightily to a space that provides them a sense of equilibrium and comfort. This requirement to place themselves in a larger historical continuum is what most defined these hip-hop headz' identity. My analysis of major

media institutions revealed that there are few spaces within the Rap Industrial Complex that the hip-hop fundamentalist can have his identity affirmed. There are a variety of challenges to hip-hop fundamentalism, most notably in these participants' focus on collectivism. With neoliberalism predominant throughout American culture at large over the last three decades, individualism is clearly the order of the day within the Rap Industrial Complex as I demonstrate in my analysis of Black Entertainment Television's "Rap City" featured in chapter five.

While many of my research informants mentioned hip-hop's inclusiveness as an open space as an attractive feature of the culture, it seems clear from my research that there is a certain segment of this population whose contributions to hip-hop culture are not valued equally – mainly anyone who is not a black male. These participants are referred to in my dissertation as *Refugee Headz*, or *The Fugees* for short. Despite an intense, life-long relationship with hip-hop, female members of the Hip-Hop Nation such as Carlita said that they still feel the need to prove themselves in these spaces in ways that the black men I interviewed didn't speak to in our discussions. In one of our interview sessions, Carlita acknowledged that as a woman she sometimes feels the need to demonstrate that she legitimately has a right to these spaces within the Hip-Hop Nation, saying,

If a certain song come on, yeah I'm gone get on the floor and make sure you know I know the words. I want you to see. I'm not just nodding my head cause I'm some chick that likes a good beat. I'm listening to what people are saying. You're gonna have a set where you play like Schooly D, where you play a Run DMC song, most girls are on the side, like "hey you know, I'll dance to the beat tonight." But I'll know the words, so I might be a little more animated. It's not a put-on because I feel the music. I like it, I want to be out there. But I'm gone let you know it's not just a passing thing with me. I appreciate the music, like if I hear LL's "I'm Bad," I'm gone go a little crazy.

Despite this double standard experienced by several of my female, white and Latino respondents, many of these participants said that they felt far more at odds in the

society at large and saw hip-hop as a space where they could deviate from social expectations more than they could above ground, outside of the Hip-Hop Nation. This point is explored in depth in chapter five that analyzes my data collected from the field. Yet most Fugees acknowledged that they may never enjoy fully recognized citizenship from the black majority within this community, and they saw little that spoke to their identity within the Rap Industrial Complex. The Fugees were unique in that they expressed their feeling that they were fighting a battle for their identities on two fronts, the Hip-Hop Nation and the Rap Industrial Complex. Despite an admittedly ambivalent relationship with black men in hip-hop at times, I found the Fugees to be some of the more impassioned and zealous members of the Hip-Hop Nation, particularly in their critique of the outside exploitation of the culture for profit.

Not all women were categorized as fugees in my research. Aramis, for example is a *tech head* who comes in contact with hip-hop culture generally through her computer screen and rarely spoke of shared space with other hip-hop headz. Aramis says that her present level of engagement with hip-hop represents a dramatic shift in her relationship with the culture, commenting: “(I get into hip-hop only) really while I’m in my car, or at home, or on the PC. I don’t really go out to any spots that are geared towards hip-hop. I used to back in the day, I used to go to The Warehouse. They’d have the breakdancing contests, the freestyle on the mic contests. They’d be hosted by Ang 13. Those were pretty cool. I kind of miss stuff like that, going to the underground parties. But I haven’t done that in a long time.” Aramis was like other tech headz in citing rising costs for hip-hop events as a primary explanation for her decreased engagement, an experience that I found not to be exclusive to tech headz. However, these identities are especially

vulnerable as there is a danger that these types of headz will fade away from the Hip-Hop Nation if their computer is taken from them. These points are particularly salient for the future of hip-hop, a culture whose mythology is largely built upon being grounded in the hood and on the block. Chapter four examines what this means for hip-hop's sense of centeredness as the hood has gone virtual.

My research respondents said that these hip-hop identities impacted multiple aspects of their lives. But the spaces in which each of these identities can be reaffirmed in Chicago are massively shrinking. Many of my participants felt as though they were being priced out of the public participation of the culture. This dynamic, that was found consistently in my fieldwork, suggests that hip-hop, originally a working class culture that challenged dominant political dogmas such as neoliberalism, is very much in danger of becoming a tool for bourgeois resistance exclusively, only reaching the working class via the commodification of the Rap Industrial Complex. And when it does reach the masses, it only offers the one-dimensional glorification of conspicuous consumption. Ironically the higher-up you are on the social ladder of the United States, the more likely you are to have an independent voice within the Hip-Hop Nation. Tech headz most clearly revealed their advantages in their exposure to more diverse and progressive messages given their enhanced technical access. It will be the responsibility of those hip-hop headz of all varieties who have survived the rat race in Chicago, New York, Buenos Aires, Cairo and Stockholm to ensure that the Hip-Hop Nation remains a space where alternative, working class values and principles can thrive.

At present, however, my findings in this dissertation lead me to conclude that the high cost of participating collectively in hip-hop has made it increasingly difficult to, in

fact, call my Chicago respondents a hip-hop “community” more than it is a collection of individuals. I argue in “Cash Rules Everything Around Me” that one major contributing factor to this breakdown in community is that the individual edicts of neoliberalism have informed hip-hop identities and behaviors in three important ways. Neoliberal ideology has helped to facilitate the decreasing space in which hip-hop headz can gather, it makes progressive outlets more costly and it forces many of my participants into an individualistic, survival of the fittest mentality. A central premise that this research works on is that as the cost of living has gone up in other areas of American life, so has the cost of being hip-hop. Hip-hop originally thrived on public participation but in big cities like Chicago over the last 30 years, public space –like many things- has been privatized in the neoliberal belief that the market knows best. At the same time that public space is being diminished in Chicago, many of my participants said that they have also found it difficult to meet the rising cost of going to private arenas that allow for the collective experience of hip-hop at rap concerts. And finally once there, many have said that they are often compelled to share space with those who don’t share their hip-hop values. These commercial limitations on the collective experience of hip-hop culture in Chicago is particularly troubling among my respondents because they are overwhelmingly more educated than the general population. If hip-hop’s supposed best and brightest can’t afford to kick it, then who can? What does this say about hip-hop? What does this say about the future of the American dream? “Cash Rules Everything Around Me” provides some answers.

Chapter two lays out the methodology for my nine months of fieldwork in Chicago. A review of the literature on neoliberalism and culture is presented in chapter

three. The subsequent chapter presents some brief vignettes that offer a more detailed look at the characteristics that define each of the five identities revealed in my fieldwork. The fifth chapter offers an analysis of my data, examining the relationship between the consumer capitalism of the Rap Industrial Complex and each of the five hip-hop identities in my fieldwork. Chapter six provides readers with an intimate look at how hip-hop is experienced collectively and analyzes why such spaces are important for the reaffirmation of the five identities I describe throughout. The dissertation concludes with a summary of my research findings and suggestions for future research in chapter seven.

## CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY

This dissertation synthesizes analysis of interviews with 25 Chicagoans who self-identified themselves as being hip-hop. My research participants had to be at least 25-years-old to be included in this study and I didn't get any respondents who were younger than 28. I chose participants in this age range because they have a more extended relationship with hip-hop where they can better speak to historical patterns within the culture. Furthermore, they are at an age where they may be expected to have advanced enough professionally where we can have a better gauge on how neoliberal economics play a role in their ability to create community through hip-hop. I made heightened efforts to use as many open-ended questions as possible in my interviews with the intentions of allowing my participants as much space as possible in defining hip-hop culture, and in explaining how they identify those that they consider part of the hip-hop community and those who they feel are outside of it. Though much ethnographic research has been done on hip-hop culture all over the world (Klopper 2000, Mitchell 2001, Maxwell 2003), there are few works that have tried to get at the fundamental question of exactly who is and who isn't hip-hop. This dissertation conducts an original analysis of what criteria individuals in Chicago have used to make this distinction.

16 of my 25 research respondents had at least a Bachelors degree, six of whom had Masters degrees. It must be acknowledged that it was not my original intent to get such an educated sampling of respondents, but these developments did have some explanatory benefits in revealing a relationship between neoliberal capitalism and the ability to create hip-hop community. Much sociological literature argues that in the United States and other nations of the west, class is rapidly replacing race as being the

source of most social boundaries. Education level plays an especially important role in creating this divide. As Lamont says of western, postmodern societies:

While the impact of social class, ethnicity, and religious socialization has been diminishing, educational homogamy has been increasing. In general, the college-educated population continues to show a high degree of similarity in its cultural practices and attitudes over a wide range of areas. The fact that a college degree remains the best predictor of high occupational status suggests that the boundaries that this population builds between itself and others are particularly significant. These boundaries are likely to be more permanent, less crossable, and less resisted than the boundaries that exist between ethnic groups, for instance. They are also more likely to survive across contexts, i.e., to be carried over from the community to the workplace, and vice versa. We see again, therefore, the importance of studying a systematic fashion from the boundaries produced by college-educated people. (Lamont 1992, 11)

Education has long been viewed as the great social and economic equalizer in American society, but this has especially been true for blacks historically in the United States. The hip-hop generation has been the first generation that has been able to take full advantage of some of the openings created in education by the Civil Rights generation and their forbearers. So while my group of respondents are by no means fully representative of the Hip-Hop Nation, their privileged market position will tell us a great deal about the relationship between neoliberalism and the ability to collectively engage in hip-hop. What makes my group of participants particularly interesting is that those who did have some college education were almost across-the-board the first in their families to go to college. Only one of my college-educated participants had one or more parents who had attended college as well. In many ways this aspect of their lives shows the great promise of government as certainly I would not have a sampling where over 50 percent had a college degree were it not for federal intervention to allow these opportunities for all Americans that had previously been denied before the Civil Rights legislation. But before this investment in the education of young black people could fully be recognized, other federal socioeconomic protections were pulled away. Hip-hop was young, black

America's response in the 1980s to the breaking of this social contract. This dissertation offers a glimpse into the opportunities and challenges for a contemporary collective response to neoliberalism in light of these changes.

Accounts of culture have frequently been incomplete because of questionable measures that do not always lend themselves to a deep comprehension of the inner workings of subcultures such as the Hip-Hop Nation. These snapshots of culture are important, but to give a more complete picture I employed multiple methods in exploring how identity and community are presently imagined in hip-hop. The methods I used in my research, beginning in September, 2007 and concluding in March, 2009, included primary content analysis of hip-hop lyrics from a variety of artists that my respondents deemed as socially relevant, extensive participant observation of local hip-hop headz, and in-depth interviews with members and artists who represent these hip-hop communities. I conducted interviews with 25 respondents in Chicago for three hours on average. I used a pseudonym of my choice for each of my interview participants. All interviews were audio recorded and written consent was a requirement for participating in the interview. The aim of my interviews was to learn how hip-hop informs my informants' sense of personal identity, what values are associated with that identity and which ones are rejected, and finally the ability of these identities to form a collective that is grounded in hip-hop principles in the face of unparalleled economic challenges.

Going into the project I had planned for a small portion of my research informants being developed from some of my initial contacts that I made in previous ethnographic work on hip-hop culture in Chicago. I planned to ensure that at least 75 percent of my interview participants were selected independent of this original circle to protect against

biases in my data. Once beginning the research, however, I was able to complete the interviews while only using one of my previous research contributors. Other research participants were sought out by observing hip-hop events in Chicago and visiting online, virtual communities devoted to hip-hop culture.

My informants were not granted access to my audio materials. Generally I did the interviews in a quiet setting of the participant's choice, but a handful were also done on-site at my observations. The interviews were generally intended to be free-flowing. However, there were some general topics of inquiry that were formed based off of my analysis of hip-hop lyrics and literature on neoliberalism including how often they attended public performances, the level at which they purchased rap CD's and other hip-hop artifacts and even how hip-hop impacts what they do for a living. Many of my questions attempted to measure the ways that they engage hip-hop, how they *define* engagement and what levels of engagement involve participation with large groups and which ones are more personalized. I also wanted to get a sense of how much my informants referenced economics directly as impacting their level of collective engagement with hip-hop culture and if they see a time shift in this process, and what factors they attribute the shift to. I also asked some more general questions related to my research participants' social background such as their income and education level to see if it was these social influences, rather than those of the Hip-Hop Nation, that informed their identities. In analyzing these issues, the perspectives of the Hip-Hop Nation were also compared and contrasted to the goals and ideals of neoliberalism as they have been described in the literature. (Harvey 2005, Peck 2006, Wilson 2006, Fish 2009) At the conclusion of my fieldwork and analysis, my task in this dissertation was to see if any

discernable patterns emerged that highlight an identifiable hip-hop community in Chicago and what new hip-hop identities have been allowed to thrive and which ones are constrained.

A metaphor that several of my participants used frequently without provocation in describing the Rap Industrial Complex was comparing these images to minstrel performers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This comparison was first introduced in 2005 when North-Carolina based rap-group Little Brother released their album, *The Minstrel Show*. Far from providing the political and social edge that transcended black thought in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many individuals in the Hip-Hop Nation shared Little Brother's position presented on their album that, much like black face minstrel performers of days past, mainstream rap music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century promoted an exaggeration of the worst black stereotypes. The ideals and goals of the Rap Industrial Complex are quite contrary to the values originally promoted by the founders of hip-hop culture and that I found in my fieldwork is true of the Hip-Hop Nation.

In exploring how young people are using hip-hop identities to respond to this larger cultural shift, it is essential that we lay out for readers precisely which identities the private media conglomerates have made available to the public. Drawing the contrasts from the mainstream imagery of the Rap Industrial Complex to those images created by the Hip-Hop Nation is essential in giving context to some of the identities taken on by my participants in regard to hip-hop culture. A full comprehension of the Hip-Hop Nation can not be gained without a detailed discussion of what those outside of the Hip-Hop Nation are exposed to. My respondents were almost universal in their agreement that mainstream media rarely promoted hip-hop in its authentic context. In testing this against

how my informants defined authenticity, this dissertation research also contains analysis of 20 episodes of Black Entertainment Television's (BET) "Rap City" from the months of September through November of 2006. I saw a total of 146 videos during this period. To avoid having only a handful of artists determine my findings, I decided to randomly analyze episodes of "Rap City" over this three month stretch. Episodes were viewed every two-to-three weekdays, as opposed to viewing 20 consecutive episodes of "Rap City." I chose this method because 20 consecutive episodes over the period of just one month might produce only a sample of who the popular artists were at the time, as over a couple of weeks there may be only 10 to 15 different videos. By choosing a random sample over two months I felt this would provide for some more illuminating patterns of the general content of "Rap City."

When I sat down to view each video I did so by modeling the video into where it stood within the following minstrel categories: *Jump Jim Crow*, *Tambo*, *The Wench*, *Jasper Jack* and *Zip Coon*. Videos were categorized according to their overall visual and lyrical theme. These categories are described in greater detail in chapter five. I scrutinized all characters and props in the video, not just the artists themselves, in deciding how to code each video. The final category that I was coding for was whether or not the video was consistent with some of the values of the Hip-Hop Nation as they are described in chapters two and three (Ro 1996, Smitherman 1997, George 1998, Boyd 2003) and as these values are reflected in the work of groups such as Public Enemy, Run DMC, Boogie Down Productions and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. The videos on "Rap City" that I categorized as Hip Hop featured imagery and lyrics that

spoke to cultural collectivism, rather than the individualistic materialism that is characteristic of neoliberal ideology and consumer capitalism.

Table 2.1

| <u>Minstrel Frame</u> | <u>19<sup>th</sup> Century Description</u>  | <u>Rap Video Description</u>   | <u>Presence of Wench?</u> |
|-----------------------|---|--|---------------------------|
| <u>Jump Jim Crow</u>  | <u>Oblivious to immediate problems because always dancing, smiling and singing</u>  | <u>Rap centered around some choreographed, group dance</u>   | <u>Yes/No?</u>            |
| <u>Tambo</u>          | <u>Character possessing a basic, rudimentary vocabulary and was utterly dull-witted on every level</u>                    | <u>Simplified rap with use of basic, rudimentary language. Driven more by chorus than lyrical bars</u>           | <u>Yes/No?</u>            |
| <u>The Wench</u>      | <u>Promiscuous, exotic, oversexed.</u>  | <u>Sexualized video prop, passive recipient to actions of men in videos</u>                                      | <u>Yes/No?</u>            |
| <u>Jasper Jack</u>    | <u>Plays dumb in order to outmaneuver white master. Rarely seen in minstrel performance except to be made example of.</u> | <u>Takes what looks to be tools of neoliberal oppression and uses it for collective benefits.</u>                | <u>Yes/No?</u>            |
| <u>Zip Coon Dandy</u> | <u>Dull-witted buffoon who hyper consumes</u>   | <u>Dull-witted buffoon who hyper consumes. Measures success through neoliberal values of material possession</u> | <u>Yes/No?</u>            |
| <u>Hip-Hop</u>        |   | <u>Collectivism, challenged individualistic materialism</u>  | <u>Yes/No?</u>            |

From my own casual observations, I was aware that sex is often used as a marketing tool in modern rap music. So in addition to my minstrel models for each video, I also analyzed all videos, irregardless of their primary category, for the presence of the

Wench. In all 146 videos that I viewed during my study, there was not one where there was a female recording artist, yet black women played a key role in the video marketing of minstrel rap. An analysis of the treatment of gender on “Rap City” was essential and was coded with the 19<sup>th</sup> century gender representations of black women found in blackface minstrel performances. As detailed in the chart above, these videos are coded for the presence of women as sexual appendages, whose sole purpose in the video is to respond to the action of the men. At the completion of my analysis I intended to find what conclusions could be taken not only by the raw percentages of each minstrel model present on “Rap City,” but also what could be gathered from the content of particular videos within the sample.

The music video is the unit I chose to analyze in this chapter because its visual signifiers can provide for a more sound analysis than music on the radio alone. The artist has the ability to reinforce the lyrics from the song with visual supports that can lay the foundation for less abstract interpretation of meanings behind certain lyrics. Additionally, a program such as Black Entertainment Television’s “Rap City” can speak more to national trends in the United States than local radio can. And finally, at an average cost of \$60,000 to \$80,000, video is easily the most important marketing tool for the recording music industry. (Banks 1998, 295) The music video is most responsible for the public face of recording artists so this medium can best speak to some of the mainstream themes promoted in modern rap music that is at the center of my analysis. Video is such a powerful medium that several scholars have noted the impact of videos on the psychology of viewers beyond just entertainment value. Rana Emerson, for example, has noted in her work how video can be a powerful tool for female rap artists in negotiating

power . (2002) “Rap City” was my program of choice because it is the only major, national program that is specifically dedicated to rap music, not the random mixture of R&B, Rap and Reggae featured on stations such as MTV-2. Also, as a staple of nearly 20 years, “Rap City” is an established fixture in influencing the trends in rap and hip-hop. The show began in 1989 to rival MTV’s popular, pioneering show “Yo MTV Raps.” When “Yo” went off the air in 1995, “Rap City” stood as the unquestioned source for hip-hop culture on television. Before its series finale in 2009, the show remained a powerful institution in rap and hip-hop as evidenced by the parade of artists who regularly appeared on the show to promote their latest works such as Lil Scrappy, UNK and The Roots.

Ethnographic fieldwork was at the core of my research. There are many well-stated arguments that contend that doing the kind of micro-level ethnographic analysis at the center of my work in Chicago is the only way to gain proper insight into issues related to how individuals experience hip-hop. Under this guise, I utilized ethnographic techniques to explore the local and see how everyday practices inform our understanding of the how neoliberalism is one process that strains hip-hop identities and the ability to gather collectively. Jacobson (1991) identifies the evolution in ethnography of several strategies that have experienced popular favor over the last century. Most still relevant today, the methods he identifies were applied to my fieldwork in Chicago.

*Modes of thought ethnography* examines how individuals in Chicago’s hip-hop underground conceptualized their community in establishing the social expectations that come with subcultural membership in the Hip-Hop Nation. *Functional ethnography* techniques involved documenting the actual behavior of individuals. *Structural studies*

pay close attention to social roles within the Hip-Hop Nation. *Processual ethnography* was of particular interest to this dissertation research. Jacobson says this observes “individuals’ actions and especially the ways in which they choose between alternative courses of action. It emphasizes the analysis of social processes, “the way in which individuals actually handle their structural relationships and exploit the element of choice between alternative norms according to the requirements of any particular situation.” (Jacobson 1991, 22) *Cultural analyses* investigates how meaning attached to particular behavior is constructed. And Jacobson identifies *neo-empiricism* as the mode of analysis of the moment, an ethnographic technique that he says lends its attention to studying the actions of people.

To incorporate these voices into my work, I initially began with a snowball sampling technique that started from four respondents that I had worked with in previous research on hip-hop culture in Chicago. One of these participants was involved in my final research. These participants were contacted because I knew from my previous project that they were engaged in the kind of everyday manifestations of hip-hop culture that I wanted to examine in order to gain some clues into how they defined hip-hop and membership within the larger community of hip-hop headz. Additional respondents were collected via an Institutional Review Board-supported project recruitment letter (included in appendix to this work) that described my research. From August, 2007 through May of 2008, I passed out roughly 800 recruitment letters to respondents in various sections of Chicago, though much of this was concentrated on the South Side, the city’s most heavily populated, and (for my interest) blackest section. For observation and recruitment I sought out sites that were explicitly devoted to hip-hop as these would be more likely

locations for individuals who are self defined as hip-hop. One participant that exemplifies the kinds of behaviors that are consistent with someone who is self defined hip-hop spoke of how he made efforts to seek out the local underground artists when he traveled to cities such as Miami, Atlanta and San Juan, Puerto Rico. This has resulted in this particular respondent having knowledge of rap artists such as Plies years before they entered into the mainstream market. There are some individuals who passively engage hip-hop almost exclusively at the point that it becomes market commodity. Conversely, someone who is defined as a *hip-hop head* in this dissertation are those individuals who say that they take an active relationship with multiple aspects of hip-hop culture and do not merely engage hip-hop at the level of commodity. Hip-hop informs their language, style of dress, literature, family structure, dietary habits and their overall world view.

There was no sense of how these participants would be categorized when I began my fieldwork, or even *if* they'd be categorized. But while all professed to define their hip-hop posture in contrast to how hip-hop is imagined in the mainstream, some boundaries quickly emerged among this group as well. The identities I ultimately discovered through my fieldwork were characterized by the personal values that my participants indicated were most reaffirmed through hip-hop culture. *Professional headz* view the Hip-Hop Nation as a space where they could find sustainable employment in jobs that they think offer more spontaneity and space for personal expression than is available in traditional work. Members of the Hip-Hop Nation who have their identities reaffirmed by having a space where they can see their black culture and history presented in a more positive light are labeled as *black headz* in "CREAM." *Hip-hop fundamentalists* are highly critical of the way that hip-hop has evolved away from

principles associated with collective, political activism. *The Fugees* are my research participants that felt as though their contributions and presence in the spaces that make up the Hip-Hop Nation were not as appreciated on par with the black males who have dominated hip-hop since its inception. Finally, *tech headz* were those research participants who most often came in contact with hip-hop culture through their computer screen and rarely spoke of shared space with other hip-hop headz.

I began interviews in October, 2008 and completed 25 in total. There were so many people willing to sit down and talk with me about this wonderful culture and music that we love, that I only interviewed one of my original contacts from the previous fieldwork project, and did not have to use any of their contacts that I collected through snowball sampling. I have used the contacts of some of those who responded to my recruitment letter. The interviews have covered over 120 hours, with another 60 hours devoted to participant observation. I personally (and foolishly) transcribed all of the interviews, and no one had access to my data other than myself.

There were four minor concerns regarding my methodology going into this project. The first obstacle that I needed to overcome was limiting my own biases in regard to hip-hop, a culture I am very much an advocate of. However, upon falling back upon my journalism background, and the recognition that the hip-hop community is in need of tough love at present, I think my questions were presented in a manner where I was able to treat the project as the fact-finding mission that it was. Yet, it was also important that I not appear too removed from hip-hop culture, or else risk my participants not speaking as freely with me as they might otherwise. Often times I could sense that my participants were measuring my knowledge in an attempt to gauge what level of

sophistication they could talk with me about hip-hop. Ronny presented the issue rather matter-of-factly a few minutes into our interview, saying, “if you didn’t know who the fuck the Group Home was, I was going to walk out that fuckin’ door right now.” By making efforts to ask questions from an informed point-of-view, I was able to get some responses layered in a complexity that may not have been provided to a hip-hop outsider. I also had to be cautious in framing my questions in such a way where my participants wouldn’t fall into the pattern of telling me what they’d think I’d want to hear. With the help of my dissertation committee I was able to structure the questions in such a way where value judgments were absent. But most importantly, I tried to listen as carefully as possible to what my participants said as many of my interview questions developed from our spontaneous give-and-take. After all, this project was much more focused on some of their conceptions of hip-hop than my own. The final challenge of my fieldwork was ensuring that I was able to actually measure the impacts of hip-hop on my informants’ identity in comparison to other social factors. Clearly individuals with the age, educational and professional background of my participants have been molded by a variety of influences that can’t be completely accounted for. But I made efforts to gain as much background information from my respondents as possible and they were refreshingly forthcoming in this regard. More significantly, I asked questions that explored the ways in which they came to form a hip-hop identity originally and how they felt this identity has evolved over time. This final methodological flaw was overcome by my respondents’ efforts far more than my own.

## CHAPTER 3 – LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 - Neo Jim Crow

Under *neoliberalism*, “citizens” are at the mercy of abstract economic laws and principles that do not take into account actual lives. It is nearly impossible to understand the development of the Hip-Hop Nation without also understanding the development of neoliberalism in influencing American domestic policies over the last quarter century. Though the philosophy has existed in many forms since Adam Smith, neoliberalism was a conservative movement that David Harvey (2005) estimates originated in the 1970’s as a backlash against what conservatives viewed as big-government policies instituted by Franklin Roosevelt through the New Deal. Conservatives, who were sensitive to the needs of corporate America, believed that these “entitlement programs” that emerged after the Great Depression to provide citizens with a social safety net in the event of unforeseen misfortune, were in reality socialist tenets that defied free-market capitalism. As white ethnics, aided with G.I. bills and low-interest home loans, blended into American mainstream, it became easier to mobilize resistance against these social safety net programs. By the 1970s this resistance was articulated through neoliberalism, which basically called for a renewed liberation of the market, rather than the federal socialism of welfare programs. Blacks, in particular, were exploited to promote neoliberalism as conservatives hammered home a message that the rapid inflation, mounting debt and general malaise of the American economy through the 1970s was the result of government entitlement programs, namely welfare. This image was crystallized with Ronald Reagan’s portrayal of the welfare queen of whom The Gipper said, “she has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 social security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four

non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting social security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names." (Hayward, 2001) While blacks in general were used as a scapegoat for moral decay in the 1980s, these race-baiting practices over time became less politically correct and politically astute. So instead, terms such as *inner-city*, *urban* and *minority* have begun to stand in for black. And more recently, *hip-hop* has frequently been ushered out as the cultural black sheep that explains away America's moral decay. By the early 1990s, however, after nearly a decade long of venomous rhetoric, Reagan had firmly instilled a belief that government "handouts" were the main problem in America, and that the nation would run more efficiently if it relied on neoliberal free market capitalism. The belief was that welfare, Medicare and other social programs stunted motivation, and that the free market was the best solution for the poor. Proponents of neoliberalism contended that the market provided plenty of opportunity for all Americans who were willing to work hard enough, and big government would stifle the ambition of the poor and this had detrimental effects for the nation as a whole. Clearly the implication taken from this was that poor blacks who were not obtaining the American Dream had only themselves to blame, and changes were needed in their values, not in the American system. This was white supremacy coded in economic principles. A more important implication was that the heightened level of material success enjoyed in the west was a testament to the superiority of the American culture and belief system. While the Hip-Hop Nation originally emerged to provide a contrast to this ideology, the public images that often are falsely categorized as hip-hop don't match up with hip-hop's defining values. A survey of

the Rap Industrial Complex will reveal an urgent need to make the distinction between rap and hip-hop more transparent for those who use the two terms interchangeably.

The genesis of hip-hop coincided with the emergence of neoliberalism as the primary challenge to the domestic security of black people in America. Where at one time hip-hop served as a sanctuary for black youth, at present many of my research participants fear that their value system is being undermined where both their success and access within the Hip-Hop Nation is measured in dollars and cents. This transfer to the enterprise cultural values of neoliberalism represents a significant shift both in the Hip-Hop Nation, and America at-large. Through the first 150 years of blacks' existence in the United States, it was largely agreed upon by those who fought for racial equality in America that a political restructuring; of the magnitude needed to facilitate true equality, could only be stimulated by the federal government. The Great Depression revealed this need for some degrees of government intervention in the economy across racial demographics. The New Deal policies that were spawned from the Depression were especially important in the assimilation of white ethnics who had previously sat just slightly above blacks on America's socioeconomic totem pole. For example, some of the Keynesian policies that were instrumental in stimulating the economy after World War II included providing domestic protections for lenders and real state firms that lead to accelerated home ownership, the government stabilized interest rates, ensured that credit was widely available, and provided federal aid to cities through the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954. (Weber 2002, 178) However, domestic unrest, economic decline and a blow to America's stature abroad created the atmosphere that allowed for the political rejection of Keynesian economics and a re-introduction of neoliberalism. Though stagflation would

eventually create a very real need for adjustments of this economic doctrine, Keynes' model would seem to have clearly enjoyed more impact and a much longer shelf-life than the neoliberal framework which presently seems to be visibly and violently unraveling right before our eyes.

As neoliberalism became formalized in America during the Reagan administration in the 1980s, it became universally agreed upon in political debate that the path to social equality could best be realized through federal policies that emphasized a dramatic reduction of corporate tax with the hopes of companies creating jobs and spurring the domestic development that fiscal conservatives said governments were unable to generate. Much like I argue that is occurring within the Hip-Hop Nation at present, others have contended that these policies facilitated a capitalistic model where only those who already enjoyed capital, which allowed them entryway into the system, could fully take advantage. Brenner and Theodore write, "neoliberal doctrines were deployed to justify, among other projects, the deregulation of state control over major industries, assaults on organized labor, the reduction of corporate taxes, the shrinking and/or privatization of public services, the dismantling of welfare programs, the enhancement of international capital mobility, the intensification of interlocality competition, and the criminalization of the urban poor." (Brenner & Theodore 2002, 3) Also under neoliberalism, services generally supplied by the state, such as water maintenance, education, public housing and public transportation were increasingly privatized, as government spending was cut in general – particularly government spending on the poor. (Chetty 2002, 25) Conservatives gained much political traction by arguing that the culture of poverty caused racial minorities not to realize social

improvement in the face of unquestioned economic growth. Increasingly, the Rap Industrial Complex has attempted to co-opt hip-hop and present an image as well that it is best to try and profit at all costs, even at the cost of hip-hop's value system. One of my central arguments is that wealth is only realized by blacks in the Rap Industrial Complex when they conform to certain minstrel-like caricatures, something that many of my participants say that they are unwilling to do. As with neoliberalism in the larger society, this cultural imagery of capitalism within the Rap Industrial Complex presents a fallacious notion that everyone is playing on a level playing field where bias and discrimination have been virtually eliminated by leaving arbitration to the blind eye of the non-judgmental market. Not only is this a wholly false premise, as this dissertation will reveal in great detail (and the crumbling economy has shown more forcefully), but also, the price for my research participants is that the gatekeepers of the Rap Industrial Complex keeps those who don't conform at bay.

“CREAM” presents an important contribution to discussions of neoliberalism and culture, particularly with a city possessing a racial legacy like Chicago serving as the backdrop. Research on how neoliberalism has been impacting major metropolitan areas makes it difficult to divorce the philosophy from race as Pieterse reminds us with his concept of *Dixie Capitalism*. Here, Pieterse (2004) argues that the low wage, high production model of neoliberalism was first mastered by shifting jobs from large northern metropolitan areas to rural southern ones. Ultimately, American companies went further south, eluding America's border altogether in a maddening search for yet-lower wages. While this geographic outsourcing mainly impacted manufacturing jobs initially, presently many middle class occupations are being affected as well. In addition to the

obvious labor market implications associated with neoliberalism, this process is important for my research participants because hip-hop served as a sanctuary for those blacks who felt they were being shut out of the system. However, with the adoption of many neoliberal values through the Rap Industrial Complex, many hip-hop headz are experiencing an identity crisis of sorts where they are a bit unsure of exactly where to turn.

And why wouldn't the Rap Industrial Complex integrate neoliberalism's value system? America's Rising GDP, record job growth, increased home ownership and new millionaires being created every night served as rock-solid proof that a neoliberal reliance on corporations to take on roles usually reserved for the government was the best model for the world. This shift made it where private corporations were given control over all types of industries, and these corporations were also highly instrumental for shaping the public's opinion to one where they too endorsed neoliberalism. If you are like most who accessed hip-hop through mainstream vehicles of TV, radio and major print media, not even rap music any longer provided any visible alternative to the one-size-fits-all model of neoliberalism. Conventional wisdom over the past three decades held that government was incompetent, but private enterprise worked with prudence and the proof was all around us in the improved quality of life of most Americans, even young inner-city blacks who had long been shut out during the periods where Keynesian principles dominated the U.S. economy. With the neoliberal banner flying high after the apparent vanquishing of socialism with the Soviet Union's fall, America felt comfortable in the early 1990s in turning many of its institutions completely over to neoliberal principles. Holmes writes of the emergence of corporate values into public life:

Private businesses are subcontracted to perform public services; private individuals can also be compensated with public money, or with tax breaks, when they go to a corporation to purchase what was formerly a public service. The citizen has fewer obligations; you are no longer called upon by universal conscription to go to war. Elections have become a kind of marketplace where, every few years, prices are compared with quality; or in other words, the proposed level of taxation is compared with the services rendered, and above all, with the performance of the private economy where most services are actually obtained. If taxes are low, streets are clean, growth is high and jobs are abundant, the party in power is voted back in. (Holmes 2006, 5)

Hip-hop culture has been infused by these values in recent years with its promotion of images that not only fail to challenge neoliberalism's reverence of individualism as hip-hop did originally, but many of today's rappers actually celebrate these oppressive socio-political philosophies in a manner that harkens back to minstrel performance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as I discuss in depth later in this chapter. Several scholars (George 1998, Boyd 2002, Kitwana 2005) have alluded to the social reality that the Reagan era in which the hip-hop generation came of age in contributed to the culture's undeniable capitalistic, individualistic tendencies. Fitzsimmons writes of the neoliberal mindset that pervaded the Western world at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>:

Underlying this is a more general neoliberal vision that every human being is an entrepreneur managing their own life, and should act as such. In terms of moral philosophy this is a "virtue ethic," in which human beings are supposed to act in a particular way according to the ideal of the entrepreneur. .. Neoliberalism is a philosophy in which the existence and operation of a market are valued in themselves, separately from any previous relationship with the production of goods and services, and without any attempt to justify them in terms of their effect on the production of goods and services; and where the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously existing ethical beliefs. For neoliberals it is not sufficient that there is a market: there must be nothing which is not a market. (Fitzsimmons 2002, 3)

Ever adapting and evolving, many in the Hip-Hop Nation have responded to this challenge of individual entrepreneurship in kind. However, this individualistic mindset,

modeled in neoliberal capitalism, is opposed to the Hip-Hop Nation's emphasis on collectivism, as Chuck D reminds us with his line "move as a team, never move alone" on 1990's "Welcome to the Terror Dome." Moving as a team is becoming a difficult option here in Chicago as my participants will show more clearly in the next chapter. Particularly of note to neoliberalism has been what this has meant in regards to the reconfiguration of public space. It is not enough that private space often requires a sizable fee to access, but public spaces have been reduced at an alarming rate in cities that have adopted neoliberal values. Brenner and Theodore write, for example, of how *creative destruction* has been a process that worked through many metropolitan areas and that my participants spoke about at length in regard to public space in Chicago. Here, in the City of Broad Shoulders over the past decade many public housing units have been destroyed in the name of public blight to make way for private real estate interests that are rapidly reshaping the demographics of the city. Brenner and Theodore said that this process of creative destruction has been an important tool used against the marginalized in what they argue are the frontlines of the neoliberal assault on the working class over the past two decades: the American city. They write, "the concept of creative destruction is presented as a useful means for describing the geographically uneven, socially regressive, and politically volatile trajectories of institutional/spatial change that have been crystallizing under these conditions.... throughout the advanced capitalist world, we suggest, cities have become strategically crucial geographical arenas in which a variety of neoliberal initiatives – along with closely intertwined strategies of crisis displacement and crisis management- have been articulated." (Brenner & Theodore 2002, 2) On many levels, however, the vision of a free market has been about as much of a myth (and

perhaps more so) as Sasquatch. The government has worked in many important ways to empower private interests at the expense of marginalized communities like those that my research informants come from. This is most dramatically seen in the transformation of Chicago's neighborhoods over the last 10-15 years. More than a product of market demand in real estate, many inner-city neighborhoods that had spurred a massive white flight from the cities a generation ago are now pricing out many of its racial minorities. While my research participants almost exclusively pointed to hip-hop's racial diversity as one of its great strengths, these hip-hop headz of urban Chicago (including my white respondents) simultaneously viewed efforts to diversify Chicago with large amounts of skepticism. This resistance is predominantly due to the fact that this rapid gentrification has not been the kind of organically-crafted diversity that they believe hip-hop to be. One thing that both my participants, and scholars who have studied neoliberalism's local impact on cities, have found is that the government has been an aggressive actor in transforming the inner-city. "Urban sociologists argue gentrification has become a pivotal sector in the new neoliberal urban economies as developers transform whole city landscapes into "gentrification complexes" of consumption, recreation, culture, and public space," argues Lippman. He writes of Chicago's move towards a neoliberal metropolis. "You only have to look at University Village or River North to see that this is true. This is facilitated by city government through Tax Increment Financing Zones (TIF's), new transportation routes, the elimination of public housing to open up land for development, aesthetic infrastructure improvements at tax payer expense, and the criminalization of low-income people of color and the policing of all populations deemed "undesirable." (Lipman 2005, 1) Though there have been claims that neoliberalism

represents the free market in its pure essence, there is much research that reveals just how reliant on government assistance private enterprise has been in recent decades. Brenner and Theodore say that this has been a particularly advantageous relationship in urban centers such as Chicago, writing:

Cities – including their suburban peripheries- have become increasingly important geographical targets and institutional laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policy experiments, from place-marketing, enterprise and empowerment zones, local tax abatements, urban development corporations, public-private partnerships, and new forms of local boosterism to workfare policies, property-redevelopment schemes, business-incubator projects, new strategies of social control, policing, and surveillance, and a host of other institutional modifications within the local and regional state apparatus....the overarching goal of such neoliberal urban policy experiments is to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices. (Brenner & Theodore 2002, 21)

One of the more glaring examples of this process of total market rule came in the plan to reform Chicago's haphazard public housing, which had evolved into easily the worst in the United States over their 60-year existence - and perhaps some of the worst in the world considering the resources invested in their creation. With more and more cities feeling the financial crunch of white flight to the suburbs (and the tax revenues they took with them), turning over civic responsibility to private markets became all the rage. In this case the Daley administration moved rapidly in instituting a plan that involved destroying the rat, roach and asbestos-infested housing projects to be replaced by more modern, mixed-income units. Residents were given housing vouchers by the city to relocate while the new units were under construction, with roughly one-third being allowed to move back (after meeting strict criteria for selection of course) upon completion. Some of these new housing units, located in real estate gems that had long been undervalued due to urban decay, would be sold on the open market to attract more higher-incomes whites and private businesses back into the city. Neoliberal proponents

declared the idea to be fiscally sound considering the housing market of the time, which the experts promised had no end in sight.

While free market warriors are loathe to support government entitlements to help fund things like Chicago's woesome public school system, they are less hostile to corporate subsidies such as those provided by the city to housing developers in charge of reforming Chicago's public housing. Not only did Chicago's taxpayers pay to tear down and clean up public housing property but they also enticed condo and town home developers by offering \$1 rent for 99 years. Nearly a decade after this massive project began in 2000, however, not only have less than 30 percent of all the proposed units been constructed, but those that are complete have sold well below capacity at an average cost of \$300,000. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Chicago's most vulnerable residents have been scattered to all parts of the city and the suburbs. These individuals have lived through generations of their public officials failing them, and now the politicians' corporate cronies have abandoned them as well. Chicago was a leader in turning over its public housing to the forces of neoliberalism, a model that several other cities followed without testing. Despite the ongoing housing crisis –which this time really does have no end in sight- many neoliberals continue to feel that this was a good idea that just ran into bad luck.

My participants say that luck has nothing to do with this process, and that this was a master plan to price the black and brown residents out of the city. Ronny, a son of Panamanian immigrants who classifies himself as Afro-Latino, says of this cycle:

Chicago in 20 years is gonna be a lot different than it is today. You just got so many areas out there in Chicago like Cabrini Green that don't exist no more. Ida B Wells don't exist no more. All of that shit don't exist and them people gotta go somewhere. So Chicago's gonna be a place, where you have - the city is gonna be a place - some good place to raise your kids and high educational standards and every thing and the suburbs are gone start to look crazy. As it is now your Auroras. Your Waukegans. Your Freeport's.

Even Country Club Hills, all them areas looking crazy. And the other thing I was saying is the Latino population and the black population can become dominant in 20 years if we can pull our resources together and stop being segregated from one another. If we don't, we not gone achieve the success that we need to. It's just too many similarities between the cultures, that trying to solve these problems separately is ignorant.

This perceived laissez-faire on steroids of neoliberalism, has revealed itself to be quite the fraud at times as the government has found its way to intervene in the market on the behalf of corporate interests quite often. This has certainly been true in Chicago where City Hall has greased the wheels repeatedly to make the city more inviting to private investment at the expense of the public. Housing has been a controversial issue that is ranked below no others in Chicago for nearly a century since the Great Migration dramatically began to recalibrate the city's racial makeup. Weber (2002) contends that this has continued to be at the center of neoliberalism's attempt to provide its solution to this issue of metropolitan public housing, writing: "Capital circulates through the built environment in a dynamic and erratic fashion. At various points in its circulation, the built environment is junked, abandoned, destroyed, and selectively reconstructed. The physical shells of aging industrial orders may sit dormant for decades before being cleared for a new high-tech "campus," while efficiencies near the central business district come down efficiently to be reborn as luxury condominiums within a year." (Weber 2002, 174) Scholarship shows that this reconfiguration of this "city of neighborhoods" was far from the random workings of the invisible hand of the market, but the city's structure is very dependent (as it always has been) on an intimate and cozy relationship between the city's pols and its private corporate interests. Much of the land along Chicago's South Side near Lake Michigan, for example, has been undervalued for generations as the city's real estate barons have licked their lips thinking of the area's profit potential. Local officials eased the process of private capital's intrusion into

communities like South Shore and Bronzeville by allowing it to become far easier to make room for these executives by creatively destroying old and outdated properties.

Weber suggests that there have not been uniform standards in deciding which buildings have been deemed expendable, writing:

Federal and local officials crafted standards of urban rebuilding that were drafted into the law. As preconditions for the use of local eminent-domain powers, these standards allowed them to triage what was worth preserving from what demanded immediate destruction. Armed with checklists of the spatial-temporal qualities that constituted blight, some of which had been developed in the 1950's by the American Public Health Association, planners standardized techniques that hid underlying motives and biases. The checklists included factors like the age of the buildings, density, population gain or loss, overbuilding on lots, lack of ventilation and light, and structural deterioration. The criteria for blight designation sometimes referred to public health statistics such as death rates from tuberculosis and syphilis. Many of the blight indicators involved some sort of mixing or blurring of boundaries: a mixture of land uses or of the race and ethnicity of residents. As Swartzbaugh notes in her historical study of race in Chicago, even though buildings on the black South Side were not as old as those on the north and west sides of that city, they were more frequently categorized as unfit or substandard. Blight was disproportionately found in nonwhite areas; one checklist even included "percentage of Negroes" as one of the three indicators of blight. (Weber 2002, 179)

And while city policies such as Tax Increment Financing were supposed to bring much needed development to some of these blighted areas, Weber says that this has frequently not been the case as many TIF incentives have been used to develop the city's downtown area. "Cities have used TIF primarily for large-scale downtown redevelopment projects and in gentrifying neighborhoods, bypassing the slow-turnover parts of the city where there is little hope of generating additional property taxes," Weber writes. "TIF has supported the entrepreneurial state's involvement in place marketing, tourism, historic preservation, and beautification. Such efforts often seek to alter the sign value of devalued buildings and places through the commodification of a sanitized kind of nostalgia. Chicago, for example, has spent \$60 million in TIF funds to renovate several downtown theatres. These historic structures could be considered obsolete because by the 1970s they no longer hosted Broadway musicals but instead showed marital arts movies

for a low-income audience.” (Weber 2002, 188) Many of my research participants said that they have felt shut out from this redevelopment and see the city as a far less inviting place as more and more urban space becomes privatized. While understood that cities across the country are faced with some very difficult choices these days, it is debatable whether making the city’s residents into consumers instead of citizens is a constructive solution. With mounting budget crises, many cities view selling their services to the highest bidder as a viable option as well. For example, earlier this year the city turned over its parking services to a private firm to disastrous results as many of the private meters didn’t work properly and frequently overcharged commuters. This process was made worse by a glaring lack of accountability for these shortcomings. In times past, Chicagoans always had the ballot box to express their grievances if nothing else, but it is more difficult to hold a CEO’s feet to the fire when his office is hundreds of miles away. But while paying for parking is a nuisance, there are other more significant public services that are invaluable, though Chicago’s corporate government has worked earnestly to put a price on them anyway. If there is an issue that rivals housing and public space in Chicago historically, it’s public school education. The state of Chicago’s public schools is an issue that intersected with many of my research participants deeply as we’ll see in chapter four.

City Hall responded to the shortcomings in many of their public schools by introducing a plan called Renaissance 2010, announced in 2004, that aimed to build 100 new private schools with much higher standards of accountability and levels of competition between schools than has generally been the case in Chicago. Aiming to replace many neighborhood “failing schools,” Renaissance 2010 schools thrive to raise

its standards by going outside the realms of official government accountability, and in theory make themselves more accountable to parents who expect certain levels of results for their money as would be the case in the marketplace. One local group opposed to the program, however, commented with high levels of skepticism, contending that “Renaissance 2010 is a plan to introduce choice, privatization, and the marketplace to public education. Every parent becomes an individual consumer in the education market, rather than communities working together with educators to improve their schools. Research internationally shows that choice plans increase education inequality, leaving those with the least resources in the worst schools.” (Teachers for Social Justice 2005, 2)

And while this may be an attractive alternative for many families, for those families without the resources to attend schools outside of their communities many children continue to be left behind. Furthermore, there are some in Chicago who contend that this process requires more of working families than it does those who put these school systems in place initially. Teachers for Social Justice, a local group opposed to privatization of public schools in Chicago write of this attempt at reform:

Renaissance 2010 blames low-income African American children and their families. It implies the only way to have good schools in these areas is to have mixed income schools. This assumes the children in the schools now are somewhat the cause of education failure, and they can only do better when they are with middle class kids. Or, schools can improve if they are moved out altogether. In fact, there are good schools that serve low-income children of color. The relationship is that the cause of a failed education system is a history of racism, lack of equal opportunity to learn, deindustrialization, and disinvestment in communities of color by corporate interests and banks with the support of political leaders. If city officials, including the school board, cared about the children, they would do something about that. (Teachers for Social Justice 2005, 1)

Those who stand in opposition to “Renaissance 2010” such as DePaul university

Educational Policy professor Kenneth Saltman contend that it has borrowed much from

President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" model" writing, "No Child Left Behind and Renaissance 2010 share a number of features including not only a high pressure model, but also reliance on standardized testing as the ultimate measure of learning, threats to teacher job security and teachers' unions, and a push for experimentation with unproven models including privatization and charter schools, as well as a series of business assumptions and guiding language." (Saltman 2008, 4) The framework where the values of private business have overtaken public education is directly related to the predominance of neoliberalism. It impacts the way that students learn, the way schools are structured and its policies are enforced, as well as how successful schools are measured. Additionally, neoliberal values inform the way teachers do their jobs. Fitzsimmons writes of the neoliberalization of education, "Teacher's work is becoming competitive, privatized, and is intensifying to the point that Apple considers it will eventually deskill teachers. Teachers who cannot renew their knowledge and receive emotional support from within the social context of their work place, will eventually either become out of date professionally or retreat into psychologically defensive positions. Teachers are workers (with) industrial concerns." (Fitzsimons 2002, 5)

In examining the allocation of public housing and education, the literature on neoliberalism has clearly revealed Chicago to be a city where neoliberal principles have expanded far beyond the economic realm. Since the early 1990s, throughout the United States, neoliberalism has worked as the predominant cultural ideology that influenced virtually every aspect of public life, including previously countercultural groupings such as the Hip-Hop Nation. Accion Zapatista de Austin writes of the neoliberalization of culture:

As the current phase of capitalism, neoliberalism necessarily involves the manipulation of culture for purposes of domination and subordination. Understood as a dynamic and plural process, “culture” refers to all of those ways in which we make sense of the world: images, stories, desires, identities, intellectual work, spiritual development and aesthetic undertakings. Emerging historically in response to a cycle of struggle that included very powerful cultural components, neoliberalism has sought to commodify, instrumentalize or destroy all those cultural activities that have undermined capitalism while pushing the human experience in new directions.” . . . . . “Thus in response to the struggles of cultural and ethnic “minorities” for a true cultural pluralism where their differences are accepted and valued, neoliberalism has responded with educational and corporate multiculturalism within which these differences are given token recognition within a context of accentuated hierarchy. In the US Chicanos are allowed to honor labor leader Cesar Chavez while, at the same time, racism is intensified against Mexicanos along the border. Cable TV allows local communities some autonomous cultural expression, while an increasingly concentrated corporate culture industry pumps a flood of Western images – accentuating the marginalization of that autonomy. Such cultural strategies amount to a new stage of what we might call the flexible homogenization of world culture.

While acknowledging the great challenges that glocal cultures must face in the constant onslaught by neoliberal consumer capitalism, the University of Texas’ student organization reaches similar conclusions as does “CREAM” in arguing that this is not a war that is being forfeited passively. Beneath the surface in the cultural underground, there are many ways that communities such as Chicago’s Hip-Hop Nation are displaying their cultural agency. In calling on strategies in which to resist the culture of neoliberalism, Accion Zapatista writes, “such cultural strategies, however, have not succeeded in reducing everyone to passive subjects or co-optable active ones. People continue to maintain and invent alternative cultural traditions of resistance and “do not plan to die though they may be killed.” New intersections between people in the North and South produce ungovernable alliances. Autonomous desires continue to produce values and social relations to which business has always been hostile, including sisterhood and brotherhood and the formation of communities where individuals can define themselves beyond consumerism within collective, shared and idiosyncratic

frames.” Those who call upon neoliberalized governments like the United States to change their methods will quickly find out that their government is unlikely to heed this call. Instead, hip-hop headz in the United States are mobilizing to educate, employ and inform themselves through organizations and personalized efforts that are not reliant on the state or private capital. These actions -that are more in line with how hip-hop has been practiced traditionally before neoliberal cooption- generally are not made available to a mass audience. In some ways, my informants suggest that this is precisely the point. The Hip-Hop Nation, as it is lived in Chicago at least, shows that it may best survive neoliberalism by navigating around it, as opposed to battling the behemoth on its own terms. However, to fully mobilize these efforts to produce concrete change there is a great need for institutional support so that my research respondents can better move as a team and not feel forced to move alone.

### **3.2 - The Culture Wars**

Grasping the literature in the study of culture and subculture is central to our understanding of neoliberalism. We can not fully understand the politics and economics at work in neoliberalism without comprehending the cultural meaning behind these policies. So for example, Stuart Hall (1988) shows how the neoliberal politics of Thatcher, Reagan and Kohl shifted the cultural value system of the West to where states were seen as impediments to the individual, and that inequality could be explained not by turning to history, but by turning a finger of blame to those who didn't take advantage of the bountiful opportunity present under neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberal economic policies have made co-option much easier, and more swift, in regard to subcultures. Culture is no exception to any other product, it is packaged and marketed by global

corporations like all other household commodities. A dozen eggs, some Mr. Clean, all varieties of coffee, and a gallon of culture can all be found in aisle nine at your local grocery store. Much like your local grocery store, however, not all products have the same devotion to quality and authenticity. The same is true of hip-hop. Many of the hip-hop headz that I spoke to think that it's not inherently a bad thing that hip-hop culture can be conspicuously consumed in the market place, even by those who don't make a serious investment in the culture. There is just considerable doubt over whether or not what most consumers receive is the genuine article. "Cash Rules Everything Around Me" concludes decidedly in the negative in regard to commodified authenticity. My dissertation concludes that the Rap Industrial Complex has provided a watered down, superficial version of hip-hop to mainstream consumers, which is not an original argument in and of itself. What this dissertation does contribute is an analysis of the way that underground identities contest this commercial cooption, while highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies.

One of the more definitive expressions of this position, in cultural studies more generally, was offered by Baudrillard (1994) who coined the terms *simulacra* and *simulation* to identify a postmodern world where culture is manufactured to a public virtually powerless to the forces of advertising. In this world people seek "copies without originals," such as exotic theme parks that represent a site that does not exist in reality, but nonetheless satisfy the consumer to the point where experiencing the real McKoy isn't necessary. Back's study of some members of the Northern Soul subculture of England (2000) comes to mind when viewing postmodernism from Baudrillard's scope in how members of this subculture were able to experience blackness through commodity

as opposed to through actual black people. The Rap Industrial Complex provides a similar mirage by presenting images of hip-hop that are wholly detached from hip-hop culture. In the context of this work, *postmodernism* refers to a cultural trend and philosophy in which representations have become more important than the actual concrete things they are supposed to signify. The model of postmodernism that is most relevant to this research is Lemert's (1997) model of *radical postmodernism*. In this view of postmodernism, individuals experience subcultures like hip-hop through cultural commodities like CD's, baggy pants and sports jerseys, without necessarily sharing the ideals of those hip-hop headz who identify with the original characteristics of the subculture. This school of thought (Lemert 1997, Baurdilliar 1998, Muggleton 2000) says that subcultures like hip-hop no longer possess any political or social agency in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, postmodern period that we now live. They say that the Hip-Hop Nation is far from alone in having its subcultural foundation washed away into the mainstream, and that this is what is true of postmodern subcultures in general. These aren't your father's subcultures, they claim. The Birmingham School's (Hebdige 1979, Clarke 1979) research on subculture examined how young people used outward signs such as clothing to make subtle political statements. The Birmingham School's analysis of punk, mod and other delinquent subcultures revealed how people used the characteristics from these personalized identities to make collective political statements against mainstream sensibilities. So from this view, taking on a personal identity that is influenced by the Hip-Hop Nation allows one to be empowered through traits that were once disadvantageous like black skin color, wearing one's hair in unconventional styles or dressing in a casual manner to object to Western societies adherence to formality. More

recently, some have contended that identity politics have not been abandoned under neoliberalism, merely new categories of resistance have been created. (Brake 1985, Epstein 1998) Scholars such as David Muggleton say that there is little political or alienated *substance* behind today's subcultural *styles*. The Hip-Hop Nation in Chicago provides us one more setting where this matter can be arbitrated.

The debate over the agency present in culture has gone on for the well over a century with the likes of Adorno and Leavis arguing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that there was little agency, resistance and independent choice present in mass culture. Adorno felt that music, for example, had to take into account too many commercial considerations to be considered genuine art and that the quality of the product was determined by its commercial value. The cultural “black sheep” of Adorno and the Frankfurt School’s day was jazz, which they felt was inauthentic culture largely because it was made too accessible via mass commodities. Unfortunately we can not get their take on the role that underground hip-hop plays in their passive view of culture. Today, while many hip-hop artists are portrayed as bad boy rebels who go against the grain of mainstream values, those that enjoy commercial success generally do so by promoting images of neoliberal materialism that the Hip-Hop Nation was born in opposition to. Studies of subcultures have demonstrated a consistent pattern of supposed anti-disestablishment behavior that will ultimately reproduce the system it set out to change, and in the long run help to reinforce the status quo. This fits the mold of what Thomas Marcuse calls a harmony of contradictions in that “terms designating quite different spheres or qualities are forced together into a solid, overpowering whole.” (Marcuse 1964, 39) This contradiction is certainly not unique to the subculture of hip-hop. Phil Cohen notes how members of the

skinhead subculture were big fans of the reggae music produced by Caribbean blacks, but some led racially-motivated attacks against blacks. And in David A. Locher's *The Industrial Identity Crisis*, his research suggests that subcultures are not resisting the hegemonic order because their survival and membership identity itself is dependent upon media and other social norms they try to resist. My research participants said that they attempt to contrast their identities with some of the popular imagery filtered through the Rap Industrial Complex, but there was some findings in my research that were consistent with Locher's in regard to the considerable cost that comes with maintaining a subcultural identity.

Locher studied members of "industrial-hardcore" bands in Ohio. Industrial hardcore was an emerging subculture that, according to Locher, defined itself not so much by what it was, but what it *wasn't*, techno and heavy-metal. This holds true of the Hip-Hop Nation as well, which defines itself in many ways by how much they behave and think outside of the normalized accepted modes of behavior in America. Locher tells us that the Industrial Hardcore subculture never developed, a factor that he argues is linked to the subculture's place within a capitalist system. The first challenge of western subcultures is that the dominant culture provides vehicles in which subcultures can display their resistance to the world. This reality makes it difficult for subcultures like hip-hop to maintain any degree of independence because they are overly reliant on mainstream media to present their vision to the world. Locher writes of how industrial hardcore was limited because of this disconnect, "other than wearing a shirt with the name of a known industrial-hardcore band, there was *no* way for an individual to visually announce to those in the know that he or she was a member of the subculture." (Locher

1998, 114) Additionally, the cost of much of this equipment and technology made it difficult for a mass culture to form, as most people wouldn't have the economic resources to become active in the culture. From his analysis of industrial hardcore, Locher would contend that hip-hop's formation and expansion was dependent on the dominant order, and could never put forth any substantial, permanent resistance as a result. This would seem to be particularly true in these recessionary times where most Americans are working with dramatically reduced levels of disposable income. But Locher's mistake in his work was that he did not look past the role that subculture plays beyond the exchange of material capital. Part of Locher's argument concerning subcultural formation is weakened in the context of the Hip-Hop Nation as its participation was never strictly dependent on access to money, and increasingly they don't desire to announce their membership at all, preferring to remain conspicuous. The Hip-Hop Nation, from the beginning, has been by its very essence opposed to many of the excesses of capitalism. Andrew Bartlett recalls how even the production of the music itself demonstrates this as "rap musicians have come to use the sampler in an oppositional manner which contests capitalist notions of public and private property by employing previously tabooed modes of citation." (Bartlett 1994, 639) A challenge of my work was to examine not only whether or not there were markers to identify members of the Hip-Hop Nation, but to analyze the lived experiences of hip-hop that give the cultural artifacts their meaning.

One of the chief proponents of Locher's view on the weakening of subculture is David Muggelton, whose work *Inside Subculture The Postmodern Meaning of Style* contends that subculture members are attracted more to the postmodern emphasis on media and style, as opposed to the resistance and rebellion that scholars have often said

was the lure of subcultures. Muggleton refers to one participant in his work, Matt, who says that the punks were not necessarily identified as a uniformed subculture until the media defined it as such. Matt said of noted Punk Band, the Sex Pistols, “if you actually look at the (early) photographs of the Sex Pistols gigs there is not a punk in the audience, they have all got long hair. ..if you look at the real photographs, nobody knew what a punk was, there was no uniform.” (Muggleton 2000, 133) Muggleton argues that it is largely the media that defines a subculture and its resistance. It is at this point that others join the subculture and adopt the uniform. In the case of the Punks this would be leather jackets, shaved Mohawks and pins, cultural commodities that Matt said were absent from early Punks. Muggleton cites Osgerby who writes “any sense of a coherent punk “movement” or punk “identity” was largely the outcome of media simplification and commercial marketing strategy.” (Muggleton 2000, 133) He adds “mass media coverage does not simply intensify weakly drawn differences between already existing groups, but *actually creates the very notion* of a subcultural identity itself.” (Muggleton 2000, 134) This mass marketing of subcultures often homogenizes them in appearance and style according to his text, a process that would seem to speak to a loss of subcultural resistance in that it places a greater emphasis on individual hedonism. Muggleton says, “our postmodern hypothesis would, in fact, state that subcultures would be apolitical cultural forms rather than gestures of resistance.” Going one step further he adds “perhaps the very concept of subculture is becoming less applicable in postmodernity, for the breakdown of mass society has ensured that there is no longer a coherent dominant culture against which a subculture can express its resistance.”

My research findings suggest something different. Not only is there very much a coherent, dominant culture to resist as evidenced by the neoliberalized values propagandized through the Rap Industrial Complex, but the reach and expansion of neoliberalism globally makes alternative subcultures of resistance even more necessary for those who are being left behind by “the end of history.” (Fukuyama 1992) My research discoveries from my fieldwork in Chicago show that Muggleton has not looked deeply enough beyond the media representations to see the ways that subcultures continue to play a vital political role, whether conscious or otherwise, in influencing how young people are negotiating neoliberalism and making what has been an oppressive system for many, work to their benefit in ways that have not previously been identified in either the literature on neoliberalism or cultural studies. “CREAM” documents some of the ways that those who are clinging to a subcultural identity are battling with private interests for their hip-hop spirits and minds.

This dissertation aims to build off of some of the groundbreaking work on hip-hop such as the case study conducted by Brian Cross (1993) who examined how spaces in which to produce community are being stifled in Los Angeles. A similar process as the one described by Cross has been under the way for well over a decade in Chicago where I argue that consumer capitalism has impacted the way that hip-hop is experienced in the city. Neoliberal philosophy has helped inform many of the decisions that have shrunk public space in Chicago, and public space has always been an important facilitator in creating hip-hop community wherever it has traveled. (Mitchell 2001, Klopper 2003) While there has been scholarship that has examined the relationship between neoliberal principles and community schools, public housing and public transportation, there has not

been sufficient research that has examined how local culture has been transformed in Chicago in the battles over public space. With the notable exception of William Upski's work, *Bomb the Suburbs*, there has been a dearth of scholarship that has documented how the public space in which racial minorities (both inside and out of the Hip-Hop Nation) can gather is withering away in Chicago. There are few subcultures where the use of public space has played as an important role as it has with the Hip-Hop Nation. Of particular importance in regard to hip-hop has been its historical placement in the hood, a site which the previous section shows is being dramatically re-defined in Chicago and other metropolises throughout the nation over the past decade. Forman writes of this relationship between the hood and hip-hop:

Since rap music's inception, its lyrics have articulated the details of place with ever greater specificity. In the process, MC's have transformed the abstract notion of space into a more closely defined locus of experience as the close-knit relations that cohere within neighborhoods and city blocks are granted discursive primacy. If space is a broadly configured dimension, place, as framed within discourses of the hood, constitutes a microscale of experience that has, since 1988, achieved greater significance within hip-hop today, "the hood" prevails as hip-hop's dominant spatial trope. The emphasis on the geocultural character of "the hood" can be heard in Scarface's 2002 recording "On My Block" when he proclaims "on my block it ain't no different than the next block," suggesting the continuity of a localized environment, individuated places that are linked across urban space. (Forman 2004, 156)

The public square is particularly important for marginalized groups who generally don't possess either the material *or* cultural capital to express their discontent through privatized, commercial mediums. "Cash Rules Everything Around Me" examines the process where space is divided, carved up and re-appropriated, and exactly what this means for the Hip-Hop Nation and how they identify themselves.

While “CREAM” attempts to take a fresh look at reconfigurations of public space in regard to hip-hop in the Chicago context, the issue of exactly who controls the cultural public sphere has been debated in the area of cultural studies for several decades. In connecting this discussion with hip-hop culture more recently, hip-hop scholars such as Gwendolyn Pough (2004) have said that hip-hop emerged to create a counter-voice to the prevailing mainstream public sphere. According to Pough, whose work examines how black womanhood has been projected and contested in the public sphere, hip-hop created a space where alternative ideas, values and norms could be collectively shared. Adding to this notion that the original incarnations of the Hip-Hop Nation represented a cultural alternative to the mainstream ideologies of the dominant culture, Mike Moore writes, “hip hop places a microphone in the hands of marginalized members of society, allowing their needs, concerns, problems and struggles to reach the mainstream.” (Moore 2007, 8) However, many current indicators would suggest that this microphone has been snatched back by the Rap Industrial Complex which has used hip-hop language and regalia to co-opt many of the subculture’s formerly oppositional messages. As the public sphere has increasingly been eaten alive by the private sphere, this has had some profound impacts for cultural identity. Hip-hop is becoming a culture that you can seemingly buy your way into, which presents questions associated with authenticity. Authenticity in any subculture is crucial, but this is perhaps *the* most crucial factor in regards to hip-hop. Mike Moore, writes of this distinction, “in hip-hop, authenticity is everything. More important than the aesthetic or the music or images is its perceived legitimacy. The question, “is this really hip-hop?” has become the litmus test of cultural worth, screening inauthentic voices from the culture’s representative space. However, the determinants of

authenticity are not obvious. The roots, as well as the branches, of hip hop's cultural boundaries are found twisted, tangled, and far from the tree." (Moore 2007, 7) Much of the reason that these cultural boundaries are tangled (a claim supported by my own research findings) is because those who are most invested in hip-hop culture often have very little power in defining how hip-hop is presented to the rest of the world. My research participants have plenty of cultural capital that goes a long way in the Hip-Hop Nation, but the gate keepers of the hip-hop industry –The Rap Industrial Complex- only accept legal tender and reject most any varieties of cultural capital.

Bourdieu (1986) introduced three forms of cultural capital that are key in comprehending how hip-hop is experienced in Chicago. His first concept of *embodied capital* describes how the values of a given culture are internalized within the individual identities of the members of the culture. It refers to an individual's dialect, their mannerisms, degree of cultural competence and their ability to interpret symbols derived from the culture. Moore writes of embodied capital: "Embodied cultural capital is developed through a process of cultural exposure, and insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, (this exposure) costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor. This time requirement creates scarcity. Moreover, exactly because cultural capital is embodied, it cannot be directly transferable. Unlike economic capital, embodied cultural capital is an integral part of the person...(and) cannot be transmitted instantaneously...by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange." (Moore 2007, 12)

As has been true of many subcultures in their early stages (Hebdige 1979, Featherstone 1991) the Hip-Hop Nation was originally a collective space where cultural capital could be acquired by one who was authentically immersed in the culture. For example, early breakdance battles were not advertised or announced. Most were totally spontaneous affairs where the only way that you could witness a breakdance performance was to be down with a local b-boy crew. (Barnes 1985) Similarly, graffiti couldn't be practiced, fully appreciated or properly interpreted without some internal cultural knowledge.

Ultimately, however, many of the cultural artifacts –particularly in regard to physical appearance- are easily acquired in the private market place. This cooption makes it where the subcultural boundaries become much more fluid, allowing those who have not committed time to acquire the embodied cultural capital to appear as a member of the group. After this subcultural look is commodified, cultural recognition is often just a short trip to the mall away. No longer is it a requirement that this artifact be received from a cultural elder, but rather someone merely able to profit from the culture.

“CREAM” concludes that not only has hip-hop's cultural capital become more difficult to obtain because “cash rules everything around” in the words of Wu Tang, but also those who generally are responsible for providing this cultural capital don't identify with hip-hop values. Quite frequently, hip-hop's supposed cultural gatekeepers have not earned their credentials. Corporations have more of a hand in marking someone hip-hop than those who have paid dues to the Hip-Hop Nation. However, there are still boundaries that allow for some distinctions, including those where one's cultural commitment will provide varying degrees of ability in interpreting some of hip-hop's cultural artifacts. Most of my research participants said that buying some Pumas that were worn by the

Rock Steady Crew or buying a Run DMC CD does not necessarily provide someone with the desired exchanges for their cultural capital. What these individuals have received is what Bourdieu refers to as objectified cultural capital.

*Objectified capital* refers to cultural artifacts that have been reduced to objects for sell in the marketplace. In regard to the Hip-Hop Nation this can include t-shirts, CD's and magazines. Most often, many of the institutions that provide this objectified cultural capital have very little to do with the original principles of hip-hop culture. It has frequently been assumed in the literature that without being immersed in the culture, objectified capital only provides limited messages for the novice. In relating this to someone buying a Public Enemy CD, for example, Moore writes, "the album will be nothing more than an economic product until someone can deconstruct its message. Cultural objects provide a store of cultural capital, but only if we are able to decipher the language. One must have access, directly or indirectly, to embodied cultural capital in order to tap the vein of cultural capital in its objectified form. Owning and understanding Public Enemy's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back* are very different things." (Moore 2007, 16) But those who are best able to deconstruct these messages are being increasingly shut out of the discussion. Many of my participants feel that their messages are being repackaged and reproduced into a language that even they have trouble comprehending. This is due in large measure to the fact that most rank-and-file hip-hop headz expressed limited institutional agency in regard to hip-hop.

What "CREAM" is most concerned with is the third form of capital that Bourdieu spoke of, *institutionalized capital* which the Hip-Hop Nation has found itself in remarkably short supply of in relation to the cultural influence of the Rap Industrial

Complex. The Hip-Hop Nation needs to erect widely respected institutions such as the Zulu Nation, League of Pissed off Voters and The Temple of Hip-Hop founded by KRS-One to ensure that their vales continue on. Moore writes of the importance of institutional capital, “institutionalized cultural capital serves as a legitimizing force on other forms of cultural capital. When one possesses capital in its institutionalized form, they hold “a certificate of cultural competence.” Cultural institutions, therefore, exist as a cultural authority. Institutions, like universities and trade schools, for instance, offer institutionalized cultural capital by awarding degrees. A degree “confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture.” Though this process, institutions offer a social guarantee on an individual’s claim to cultural capital in its embodied form.” Rather than organizations such as the Zulu Nation or the Rock Steady Crew anointing someone as hip-hop, increasingly this is done by the Rap Industrial Complex. Moore contributes to this discussion, writing of record labels specifically, “record labels are the gatekeepers of hip-hop imagery. Labels determine not only which artists are signed, but what message reaches the people. In other words, discounting the relatively small voice of underground artists, record labels have a monopoly on the distribution of cultural imagery.” (Moore 2007, 14) I argue here, however, that this control over the cultural imagery of the Hip-Hop Nation extends beyond record labels. In a glaring display of how the Rap Industrial Complex often manifests itself across various industries, Hughes writes,

The success of Run-DMC/Adidas partnership led to rappers, officially and unofficially, endorsing products. In 1994, when Snoop Dogg’s “Gin and Juice” hit the charts, sales for Tanquary Gin went up 10%. Riding that wave, Absolut Spirits Co. executive Carl Horton successfully introduced Seagram’s Gin & Juice product. Other liquors mentioned in rap songs included “Henny” (aka Hennessy), “Dom P” (aka Dom Perignon), and Cristal Champagne. Earlier this year, Sean P Diddy Combs and Busta Rhymes released a song title “Pass the Couvoisier,” celebrating an upscale brand of cognac. Witnessing the power of the culture, major companies increased

advertising to reach young consumers. Some \$150 billion was spent in advertising to reach young consumers. Some \$510 billion was spent in advertising in 2001, according to Wikofsky Gruen Associates, a media, entertainment and telecommunications research firm. Most of that money - \$53.5 billion worth- was spent on network television spots, with the remainder split between cable TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and the Internet. (Hughes 2002, 3)

Not unsurprisingly with so many individuals involved in the process, there have been some cases where the Rap Industrial Complex has been off the mark such as an ad used by Toyota in 2001 that featured a smiling black man with a gold Toyota BAV4 implanted in his teeth. The ad cost Toyota an additional \$7.8 million from the diversity training program they launched to bring the resulting backlash down a few notches.

Another example that showed the poor taste of the Rap Industrial Complex was Kentucky Fried Chicken's 2000 ad that featured a cartoon Colonel Sanders rapping and doing the cabbage patch dance to chants of "Go Colonel, go Colonel!" (Hughes 2002, 4) Most corporations are savvy enough not to go this far in playing to racial stereotypes, but as more and more control of hip-hop's imagery falls outside of those who have the culture's best interest at heart, will there be an end in sight?

Of concern to many hip-hop headz is that not only is the public sphere of hip-hop being sold out for commercial considerations, but frequently a lot of this commerce which has been estimated to reach as high as \$12 billion annually, (Hughes 2002) is not being reinvested into hip-hop culture in general, or the black communities that make up its spiritual base. And despite free market proponents' claims to the contrary, this false market is not merely related to consumer demand alone but also the perceived assistance by the white buying public who only consume images that are non-threatening to them or that reinforce their values and cultural superiority. "CREAM" contends that a limited, stereotyped identity is presented to the public that is absent much of the complexity I observed in the hip-hop community. Samuels writes in support of these conclusions,

“Although rap is still proportionally more popular among blacks, its primary audience is white and lives in the suburbs. And the history of rap’s degeneration from insurgent black street music to mainstream pop points to another dispiriting conclusion: the more rappers were packaged as violent black criminals, the bigger their white audience became.”

(Samuels 1991, 147) The fact that whites are rap music’s primary consumers is not problematic in itself, but as Samuels continues, this has gotten hip-hop away from some of its original principles of using hip-hop as a cultural meeting point, writing, “the ways in which rap has been consumed and popularized speak not of cross-cultural understanding, musical or otherwise, but of voyeurism and tolerance of racism in which black and white are both complicit.” (Samuels 1991, 153)

While the Rap Industrial Complex owes much of its formation to the gangsta image popularized in the early 1990s, as the decade came to a close several caricatures began to emerge that better reflected the values of neoliberalism. More recently the predominant stereotype has generally featured a hyper-consuming minstrel character that seems to value conspicuous consumption of luxury items over all else. This image would not be so problematic if it were able to stand along side some of the complex hip-hop identities I discovered in my field work, but the modern rap minstrel has become very one-dimensional. Alternative images were in such short supply in mainstream media that when North-Carolina based rap-group Little Brother released their album, *The Minstrel Show* in 2005, it served as an appropriate metaphor to what many felt rap music was becoming. Or was it metaphor at all?

Hip-hop emerged as a direct challenge to the neoliberal belief that structural inequality was not a responsibility of government, but instead was the product of a black

subculture that accepted a lack of morality and self-discipline. Just as minstrel performance was used in the ante-bellum period to maintain the white supremacist power structure after the Civil War, neoliberalism utilizes rap to reinforce its political goals today.

Perhaps the most important implication that I took from Little Brother's work is that minstrelsy of hip-hop is not an arbitrary process, but is something done to maintain white supremacy by America's corporate media elite. The dissemination of these stereotypes under the supposed category of hip-hop culture not only work to demean black people collectively, but they also work to maintain the white power structure. In using minstrelsy as the frame of reference with *The Minstrel Show*, Little Brother positions this process as a historical continuum to how blacks have been portrayed in other moments of American history.

While minstrel performance in America dates to at least 1789, the exaggerated theatric presentation of black character types through the use of blackface and stereotypical mannerisms did not become part of mainstream American culture until the 1820s with Thomas D. Rice's production, "Jump Jim Crow." The unique dance; which imitated a crippled slave that entertained Rice in his youth, is what distinguished Rice's work from others for fascinated white audiences and made for the explosion of this new genre of performance that was uniquely American. In addition to the commercial gains reaped from capitalizing off of black stereotypes, the minstrel performances were never absent political implications. The fact that America's segregation laws would take their name from the popular "Jim Crow" dance is significant in itself. But as the Civil War neared, and abolitionism gained momentum, many minstrel performances portrayed a

view of plantation life where slaves were happy and content, and would be lost in the wilderness without the aid of their benevolent masters. The minstrel performances of today have a similar impact in that the shiny, happy people featured on “Rap City” and other mainstream mediums give the impression that black life is good on the American plantation, though the “refugees” of Hurricane Katrina and North New Jersey might beg to differ. (Fugees, 1996)

Specific minstrel character-types emerged during the ante-bellum period. These frames would be so powerful that in many ways they would become the basis of much of our racial understanding to this very day. The prototypical minstrel character; *Jump Jim Crow*, was always dancing, smiling and singing. The *Tambo*; perhaps perfected with Steppin Fetchit, possessed a basic, rudimentary vocabulary and was utterly dull-witted on every level. *Jasper Jack* was a ridiculed character that was seen sparingly in 19<sup>th</sup> century minstrel performance. He was portrayed as a bit of a trickster who couldn’t be trusted, largely because he was always trying to outsmart his master. The *Wench* was an oversexed, promiscuous, exotic black woman, frequently with light-skinned, mulatto features. And finally, the *Dandy* or *Zip Coon* is noted for foolishly trying to imitate the white upper class to horrible effect. The *Zip Coon* is overzealous and pretentious with his material display, and lack of social grace. Even lower than white nouveau riche, the *Zip Coon* overtly shows his ignorance, vice and misplacement in white high society but is too stupid and self absorbed to notice. The *Zip Coon* is the last in on a joke that the audience already knows, that these childlike habits will ultimately be the *Zip Coon*’s undoing. Like a car crash, 19<sup>th</sup> century whites watched with horror, but couldn’t turn away.

The Dandy Zip Coon has probably had the most enduring influence in America, and certainly has received the most global traction. Magubane (2002), for example, discusses in her work how the image of the dandy was exported from the U.S. to 19<sup>th</sup> century South Africa. There, this stereotypical imagery played much the same role that it did in 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century America of “managing class and race insecurity.” In both countries, these minstrel images have been trotted into the public square during periods where black and white contact became heightened after periods of institutionalized segregation. By ushering in the minstrel figure, the state is able to exercise some level of control over what identities will be made available to the public.

One obvious difference between most minstrel performances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and today’s modern rap music is that most of the entertainers today are black, as opposed to whites performing in black face. This makes the power of minstrel rap that much more significant, not less. Yumy Odom, director of Temple University’s Pan-African Studies Community Education Program says of some contemporary black artists, “If you look at what’s been done to Mary J. Blige and Lil Kim, they’ve been transformed into white women. What it is, is Black women in white face; a Euro streamed image. It’s like making a caricature. Their interest is in getting some jewelry.” (Walker 2006, 23)

Observers of the Hip-Hop Nation like Little Brother note that there is little accessible in mainstream vehicles like “Rap City” that resembles the hip-hop that Geneva Smitherman (1997) said emerged as a direct response to poverty. This fact makes it necessary in my view for hip-hop to forge a separate category of music, and I argue that the most accurate frame of what is mainstream accessible is *minstrel rap*. Clever marketing campaigns can show us that Colonel Sanders and Fred Flintstone can rhyme

some words together to form a rap, but even a novice to the culture can comprehend that these images were not derived from the Hip-Hop Nation. Neither is much of what America is receiving on mainstream programs like “Rap City.”

There have always been some misappropriations of hip-hop culture. However, this current crossroads that the Hip-Hop Nation finds itself at is more daunting because of the constraints placed on those who wish to challenge some of these mainstreamed, artificial hip-hop images and identities facilitated by the Rap Industrial Complex. My hypothesis predicts that civic activism is generally taken on by people who can afford it, so “CREAM” attempts to explore how the increasingly high cost of public participation in hip-hop limits the culture’s agency for activism. Secondly, this privatized hijacking of hip-hop identities is happening while the city is limiting public space in which hip-hop headz can gather collectively. But Dimitradis reminds us that this is not the first time that hip-hop’s reliance on shared physical space has been reduced by external advances outside of the Hip-Hop Nation, writing of the popularity of rap’s first hit record, “Rapper’s Delight,” “The decentralized face-to-face social dynamic which marked early hip-hop has thus given way to a different social dynamic, one mediated by way of commodity forms such as vinyl, video and CD. These configurations have separated hip hop’s vocal discourse from its early contexts of communal production, encouraging closed narrative forms over flexible world-play and promoting individualized listening over community dance.”(Dimitradis 1996, 179) Yet many of my informants said that this communal feel existed with them despite these technological advances, and have argued instead that other social factors related to income and space have impacted their

communal interactions within hip-hop in Chicago. The following sections provide some insight into why.

## CHAPTER 4 – EVERYDAY PEOPLE

*Alien can blend right on in wit' yo' kin  
look again 'cause I swear I spot one every now & then  
It's happenin' again wish I could tell you when  
-Outkast, "Aquemini" -*

### 4.1 – Everyday People

Many authors on subcultures (Hebdige 1979, Muggleton 2004, Featherstone 2007) have generally agreed that they don't have a very long shelf-life. They start off as true resistance cultures but as the culture rises in popularity and becomes more widely accessible, many subcultures cease to maintain their countercultural elements. There is widespread sentiment that the subculture of hip-hop may be at this stage presently. In 2006 one of hip-hop's most respected MC's, Queens-bred Nas, said that hip-hop culture was in fact dead, a perspective that most of my participants rejected overwhelmingly. "When I say 'hip-hop is dead,'" Nas said of the title of his 2006 album, when interviewed about the issue on MTV, "basically America is dead. There is no political voice. Music is dead. Our way of thinking is dead, our commerce is dead. Everything in this society has been done. It's like a slingshot, where you throw the muthafucka back and it starts losing speed and is about to fall down. That's where we are as a country. What I mean by 'hip-hop is dead' is we're at a vulnerable state. If we don't change, we gonna disappear like Rome. I think hip-hop could help rebuild America, once hip-hoppers own hip-hop. We are our own politicians, our own government, we have something to say."

One of my participants joked that hip-hop died in April of 2007. This was when White House chief of staff, Karl Rove, morphed into MC Rove at the annual Radio-TV Correspondents Dinner where he rapped about some of the Bush Administration's achievements (as oxymoronic as that might sound) using hip-hop dialect and posturing. It

is debatable whether or not this is what Nas had in mind when he spoke of the marriage between hip-hop and government. More recently, GOP National Chairman Michael Steele said that he was going to expand the faltering party by using hip-hop to reach a “urban-suburban audience.” Steele’s comments belies a harsh reality that, for many, hip-hop is a disposable culture that can be appropriated at will and discarded when it has exhausted its usefulness.

With so much confusion and misappropriation of the culture, it appears urgently necessary to take a more academic examination of exactly what this hip-hop thing is, who is authentically hip-hop and how membership in this community is defined. Simply listening to a rap song doesn’t make one hip-hop. Nor does colorful use of hip-hop’s dialect or wearing baggy jeans. For my research participants, even rapping itself did not make you a citizen of the Hip-Hop Nation. Nonetheless, the Hip-Hop Nation consistently displayed itself to be very inviting to those who didn’t live and breathe the culture like Alfonso professed to at the beginning of this document. The Hip-Hop Nation welcomed new converts without putting too much pressure on voyeurs who didn’t want to take up permanent residence in the Hip-Hop Nation. Most of my research respondents felt that it was not as if these outsiders took nothing away from hip-hop. It is just that they didn’t share the same level of investment in the culture as someone who “lived that shit” such as Alfonso. Foreigners to the Hip-Hop Nation can easily visit and be made to feel at home. They can stay as long as they like and feel free to come and go at their leisure without a passport. However, only those who truly invest in the future growth of the Hip-Hop Nation are respected as full citizens. So in this light Michael Steele may have his work cut out for him in trying to reach those who identify themselves with hip-hop, but they

are open to him finding a place at the table at his own pace. Alfonso says of hip-hop's open border policy, "that's the thing about hip-hop we ain't gone turn nobody away. Hip-hop ain't gone turn nobody away. It's a gift and a curse, that's the bad thing about it. We *should* turn some people away. But we have to have them cause then we wouldn't be fighting against nothing." This dissertation argues that they are primarily fighting off the ill effects of the neoliberalized Rap Industrial Complex in trying to maintain control of both their individual and collective identities. The basic notion of this open-border policy came from the belief that hip-hop can be a space where you can be whatever you want to be, and it allows the cultivation of many identities that aren't given traction in the mainstream. "Hip hop gave me a forum to define and recognize the bit of rebel that was in me," says Carlita, a 31-year-old Fugee who works in public relations. "I think that by-and-large I am a conformist in many ways. And I don't think that's a negative thing. I'm an adapter, I know how to get by. So I would have been a good negro (without hip-hop). I've done all the things that good negroes do. And my life would have ended there. Good negroes take care of their family, go about their business, stay out of trouble, go to school, get a good job. That's what good negroes do. A good negro keep his nose to the grind and don't step out. But that's wack."

While my participants were effusive in their explanations that everyone is welcome in hip-hop, after some time many of their comments belied a reality that they very much care about who is and who isn't hip-hop. The Hip-Hop Nation is very welcoming so others aren't denied citizenship but it is also clear that those who don't live according to certain values and cultural aesthetics are treated as second class citizens of the Hip-Hop Nation at worst, and treated with guarded suspicion at best. Upon entering

the borders of the Hip-Hop Nation, one of the first things you'll note about its citizens is that they are an imagined community that has a strong disdain for associating with mainstream, Rap Industrial Complex-based representations of hip-hop. 32-year-old Bobbi, who was first introduced to hip-hop through her older brother and independent Chicago radio outlets like WHPK, says of the difference between mainstream rap and what she feels is authentic hip-hop music, "mainstream is the shit that you can turn on any radio station, any TV program, any website or whatever and you can see and hear the same catchy tunes or whatever being played. Underground is more stuff that you have - like for instance, let's say like Pharaoh Monche. Yo regular average everyday motherfucker don't even know who the fuck Pharaoh Monche is or how to find a Pharaoh Monche album. You would have to be a connoisseur of that kind of music to be able to know where to find it or to even know where to look for it." These kinds of sentiments were echoed throughout my research showing that the Hip-Hop Nation is no different from other nations in needing to frame its own collective identity against a strange and foreign other. In this way we see that the Hip-Hop Nation, for all its progressiveness, would likely create another boogeyman if the "mainstream" Rap Industrial Complex were not present to facilitate this role. The Hip-Hop Nation frequently made efforts to form its own collective identity to fall in direct contrast with the values and customs of the Rap Industrial Complex which glorifies conspicuous consumption. But many of my participants felt that there should be space carved out for these others, which contrasts with the principles associated with neoliberal nation-states on many levels.

One of the ways that the Keynesian economic model fell out of favor in recent decades was by scapegoating the morals and values of black folks for the economic woes

of America from the stagflation crisis of the 1970s to the ongoing housing crisis, where blacks have frequently been singled out as being responsible for taking on more house than they could afford. The popular portrayal for the last 30 years was that poor blacks didn't possess American values of thrift, hard work and personal responsibility. Many young blacks have been acutely aware of this process and have conversely imagined an identity that is increasingly more disconnected from their state-based one. During an era where Reagan and Bush routinely assaulted the black psyche for political effect, many blacks coming-of-age in the late 1980s and early 1990s found sanctuary in hip-hop. While my field research revealed hip-hop to be amazingly diverse, this imagination of the Hip-Hop Nation is especially salient for young black Americans who frequently are both shutout from many of the fruits of capitalism during its boom times, and scapegoated during the down times.

#### **4.2 - Black Headz**

Black headz are those research participants who were attracted to the elements of early hip-hop culture that allowed blacks to work from a position of strength. For this reason, many of the headz that fell in this category were highly protective of hip-hop still providing this voice. It is this community of hip-hop headz whose identities are most under assault by neoliberal capitalism. Without provocation, my respondent Neil puts Afrocentricity front-and-center as the core of hip-hop expression. Neil and his wife Felicia's experiences show how many hip-hop headz are being forced to take on more and more personal responsibility to bring about progressive changes locally. One of the greatest variables that allows for progressive change is education. And for many hip-hop headz, and Chicagoans of all backgrounds, this is becoming more and more challenging.

In sending their two oldest children to five different schools in three years, Neil and Felicia quickly found that America's schools don't offer much in reaffirming the value of black people, which many have long argued has a profound impact on the life course of black children in America. Sadly, after several generations in America, many of my participants have said that they have come to expect an education system that is not reflective of their cultural context. Neil and Felicia were no different and were aware that many evenings would have to be spent building back up the black psyche that had been institutionally mocked and demeaned during school hours. But what was not expected by Felicia and Neil is just how ill prepared America's children of all shades were to compete in an ultra-competitive, global labor market. A common trait that I found linking my research participants is a reluctance to sit around and wait for anyone else's help. This is not surprising when you see that hip-hop culture emerged in an era where public funds were being cut for the after school music and art programs that helped maintain many young people's interests in a Eurocentric education that had little connection to their everyday lives. Not having access to musical instruments, the Hip-Hop Nation reinvented the commodified vinyl record and turntable and made them become the instruments. No Soho art galleries or New York Metropolitan Museum curators were going to go into the ghettos in search of the next great artists, so through graffiti, early hip-hop headz brought their art to the city via public transportation. If nothing else, the Hip-Hop Nation has always been resourceful, and its response to postmodern neoliberalism has proven to be no different.

One of the more graphic manners where we can see that neoliberalism is impacting the nation's black and brown inner cities is in the government's neglect of the

public school system. Chicago schools have been particularly impacted by this process as 60 public schools have closed in Chicago since 2007 at the same time that 68 new private schools have opened. Over 72,000 students have been affected by the school closings which have overwhelmingly been concentrated on the city's south and west sides. In an era where America's children will be thrown onto a world stage and forced to compete with laborers all over the planet, perhaps no group of young people are more ill prepared for this challenge than those attending Chicago's public schools. And even when performing at optimal levels, many in the Hip-Hop Nation have not found that America's schools will produce the kind of results that investing in education had for previous generations. Many of my black participants are like Neil and Felicia who believe that America has no real interest in educating their three children and have responded in-kind by cultivating habits for success under this do-it-yourself capitalism.

Neil and Felicia, both college educated themselves, take education very seriously. Perhaps the only thing that this married couple of six years takes more seriously than knowledge and education, is the Afrocentric identity that they credit the Hip-Hop Nation with helping them to develop during their teenage years. Neil and Felicia are like many young blacks who were drawn to the Afrocentricity in hip-hop culture that placed blacks in the center, far different from the relationship they've had historically with America. These members of the Hip-Hop Nation are labeled *black headz* in this dissertation. Groups such as Poor Righteous Teachers, Brand Nubian, X-Clan, Public Enemy and even the white group, Third Bass, made it a point to counterbalance one-dimensional portrayals of Africa in media and textbooks by expanding this discussion beyond slavery more than it ever had been in such an accessible medium as hip-hop. While these

messages of Afrocentricity are no longer commercially viable in the Rap Industrial Complex, hip-hop headz within the Hip-Hop Nation have long recognized this void of black reaffirmation throughout American society, and this has become particularly troubling in a federal school system that can't even make the claim that it is providing the youth with a valuable investment in their economic future. Felicia and Neil said that the independent messages and autonomous-based goals associated with hip-hop were instrumental in their establishing a home schooling institution for their three sons. The South Side couples' three-year old Oujima Education Center was established with the purpose of providing their children a more holistic education that could better prepare them for the rapidly changing world. Felicia and Neil felt strongly that continuing to keep their children in public schools would leave them at a pronounced disadvantage.

The African name of the school, which translates to mean cooperativeness and pulling together, is not chosen by happenstance. Throughout my research I saw collective goals emphasized in a variety of social endeavors. Education is no different, so in this way the Hip-Hop Nation frames education as something that will be done to bring about collective benefits, not individualized ones. The neoliberal solutions to substandard education alternate between privatizing education, or issuing personalized school vouchers, which may provide some temporary relief to some families but does little to help educate the neighbor's kids down the street. By making collectivism a part of the school's goals, this type of communal thinking is being socialized to Neil and Felicia's children in a way that fewer and fewer American children are exposed to. One of the most important aspects of Oujima that Felicia and Neil directly attribute to their placement within the Hip-Hop Nation, is the culture's Afrocentric influence. Both Felicia

and Neil acknowledged coming from traditional middle class, church-going backgrounds but discovered extra layers to their identity that were revealed to them through the Hip-Hop Nation. In my interviews, the South Side couple who both wear their hair in locks that come to their shoulders, said that the value system of the Hip-Hop Nation helped propel them to create an autonomous institution that will allow their children to be socialized in some profoundly different ways than most black children who are socialized in more traditional, Americanized ways. Unlike most American schools, for example, Oujima had no set hours. There were no 8 am or 3 pm bells. School was *always* in session, as Neil and Felicia made efforts to incorporate their leisure activities into the school curriculum. In this way, learning outside of the classroom, and learning from more than just the teacher was a significant contrast to how many American children are educated in the public school system. Additionally, creativity and Afrocentricity were stressed at levels that these prototypical black headz said was important for their children's developing identities. Having a space where they could be reaffirmed was essential in this regard.

In the Hip-Hop Nation, there are few things that have more value than knowledge and learning. But education is not a means to an end as it is with a student body that increasingly only see education as valuable in how much of a salary it translates into. While these goals of economic empowerment are vital to the Hip-Hop Nation as well, the primary goal of education at Oujima is not to use education to be better positioned to buy a house or a Jaguar or even land a good job, but rather to help others have a better quality of life through educating themselves. Rarely are such collective goals a part of neoliberalism in general, or the Rap Industrial Complex specifically that informs most

common understandings of hip-hop. If you're getting information on hip-hop through the Rap-Industrial Complex that features discussion of rap music when its immersed in some sort of controversy, it's highly unlikely that you'll meet people like Neil and Felicia.

Felicia grew up in a close-knit family in Hyde Park where she was early-on introduced to hip-hop by her older male siblings, as well as the local branch of the international Zulu Nation. "I remember my oldest brother, who was like 10-12 years older, would be playing these tapes. And this one tape, it was LL Cool J's "Candy." That became my nickname. And I remember my mother hearing it and being like "I feel good about what?" Felicia reminisces with a smile, as she twists her dreadlocks with her left index finger. "And in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade my brother got me Eric B and Rakim's *Paid in Full* and I was so frantic when I memorized it. My mother was like "ok you memorized that, now lets do the Constitution." Though Felicia said she did not find her parents "nagging" quite as humorous at the time, in retrospect she does see the value in hip-hop's power as a mnemonic device to help cultivate learning and memory . This is something that she and Neil have incorporated into their three-year-old school.

There is nothing inherently hip-hop about home schooling. Many parents are following this route. But the source of Neil and Felicia's inspiration came from the do-for-self edict of the Hip-Hop Nation. It is also significant that many of the reference points from the school encompass both a hip-hop and Pan-Africanist philosophy. Neil and Felicia's children seemed perfectly grounded and mature beyond their years by any measure, but were often given institutional stigmas at most of the schools that they previously attended. Neil recalls of some of his children's experiences in school saying, "I feel that the school put you inside a box and try and create a solider out of you for lack

of better words. Because all the soldiers have to march a certain way, all march the same. Here at our school our children are able to express themselves as they really are.” The 30-something couple said that the Hip-Hop Nation gave them space to see themselves as they were before they took on their Afrocentric identity in their early 20s, so reflecting upon their own socialization in their formative years made them keenly sensitive to this socialization in their own children. Felicia says that the move to create their own Hip-Hop and African-centered school came out of a desperation from where she said she saw her children on the verge of psychological homicide resulting from the constant institutionalized stigmatization they were receiving by being labeled with learning disorders that only could be aided with addictive, prescription drugs. In describing the change that she has observed in one child, Felicia comments, “after a series of events I saw my son being broken down by a vicious system. I saw a very excited child that wanted to see life that would always tell me, “I just love life” go to a child that didn’t want to get up to go to school in the morning. And those 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade years are so pivotal. This is how we see the prisons set up. At that point (in school) they stop learning, the average inmate. So we decided to make that decision to home school.” The Hip-Hop Nation stresses *collective individuality*, where people are unified through principles of speaking to their individual spirit. Neoliberalism, and its propaganda-based educational system, doesn’t allow as much space for these kinds of individualized experiences that drive the Hip-Hop Nation.

From the very beginning, the Hip-Hop Nation has worked to provide more context to some of America’s story in ways that are noticeably absent from the modern day Rap Industrial Complex. One of the most important ways that this is experienced is

in providing their children an education that works from a more critical perspective of the United States and its history than most public schools would provide. For example, while much of Americanized education suffers from heroification, only discussing the more glamorous aspects of American history, Neil and Felicia are able to bring more nuances into their lesson plans than are allowed in the public schools. Singh (2004) writes for example of how the Civil Rights Movement was co-opted and reworked historically to serve as part of the American narrative of progress and democratic principles in motion. Much of the intensity of this struggle is simplified to feature a few marches, a speech here and there, sprinkled pockets of integration, then magically brotherhood prevails, and everyone lives happily ever after. All in less than about a decade. At Oujima, Neil and Felicia provide the kind of critique of this view that is found throughout the Hip-Hop Nation's view of America. Felicia says, for example, of the "I Have a Dream" speech during the historical March on Washington, that most Americans never really get the full message of the speech, which was much more militant in its position against America than is often credited historically. Felicia says, "They teach the children that the speech is just about a dream. So then you see assemblies and presentations where kids are like (does more innocent voice) "I have a dream and this and that." And it sound cute but they don't never really delve into the speech -that was freestyle by the way, not rehearsed, not written down, freestyle. 19 minutes- they don't delve into the part where he talks about the government and that check, where he's talking about the insufficient funds. But the school and the parents don't even want to tell them. They just want them to have a dream."

“He definitely called the government some white supremacist, without saying it,” Neil adds with a reflective laugh. In interpreting the speech as freestyle, it shows the ways that my respondents’ placement in the Hip-Hop Nation consistently influences their world view. Chicago’s Dr. Carol Lee is one of the pioneering scholars who has developed unique educational models that explore the ways that young black children can use growing up in a hip-hop influenced environment to help facilitate their education. (Lee 2007) So it is likely that as more children get left behind that more of the Hip-Hop Nation may have to use this alternative model for education that differs significantly from the neoliberal framework.

Surviving neoliberalism requires that education be more active and engaging, and hip-hop headz are tapping into this in ways that most American schools can not. The fluid nature of Oujima, for example, also allowed Neil and Felicia to have more lived learned experiences such as taking a drive to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina rather than getting their children into the lazy Americanized habit of relying on others to shape their perspectives. The school days generally began with a recitation of Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka or Gwendolyn Brooks. Felicia and Neil encouraged critical thinking by forcing the children to study metaphors used by rap artists such as Common. They listen to NPR, WVON and read the newspaper as a family and the children are asked to orally explain what they took in and how they understood it. Field trips to cultural events are frequent and even the car ride is an educational experience. A stop sign is used to teach geometry where the children are given roving, pop quizzes on what the shape of the sign is called and what other shapes could be created from the octagon. Upon returning home, there will be time set aside for reading, internet research or oration. Perhaps most

significantly, Neil and Felicia also create an environment where their children can be comfortable taking on a non-conformist identity by dressing in African garments both inside the school and most everywhere they go publicly. Felicia says of this concentrated effort to publicly present an un-Americanized identity, “I personally like to let people understand who we are. I like to represent so I purposely wear (West African) dashikis with some jeans. I purposefully do that when I go to places like that to show that we not too far removed from our African heritage and we proud to continue to wear them.” Neil and Felicia have also made conscious efforts to almost totally detach themselves from the imagery and ideals of mainstream media, allowing their children to grow up in an environment where alternative ideals will be normal. They depend on almost exclusive access to hip-hop’s underground in learning of new music, relying predominantly on word of mouth to be kept in the loop, though Felicia did confess to occasionally viewing BET to see what new depths the minstrel rappers had sunk to. And while they do support some independent hip-hop media sources, they generally avoid mediums that they feel are not properly representative of the Hip-Hop Nation such as *The Source*, *Vibe* or *XXL* magazine.

Part of the way that Neil and Felicia have been able to facilitate this kind of home schooling environment, that contains three computers, a library with over 300 books and materials for arts & crafts is through an expanding hip-hop economy that has allowed them to have economic independence through the self-owned business that the couple operates out of their home. Their eight-year old business specializes in educational books, documentaries, t-shirts and other Afrocentric jewelry, artwork and crafts. The get-rich-or-die-trying edict of neoliberalism often places heavy restrictions on how independent

some purported hip-hop institutions can be. Felicia and Neil offer a model for others who are frustrated at the underperformance of the weakened American giant and its impotent institutions, the public schools being one of the more glaring examples but far from the only one. Neil and Felicia were increasingly motivated to create an autonomous center of education that they felt could better prepare their children to compete than the educational framework that my participants, who have been products of Chicago's public schools, say leave black children in particular at a marked disadvantage. However, while Neil and Felicia's efforts are admirable, Oujima provides a single-family solution in much the same way that neoliberalized vouchers (chapter three) would. The Hip-Hop Nation needs to create institutions so that couples like Neil and Felicia are not left to fend for themselves. After all, they could maintain an identity in the American nation if they wanted to be left on their own. Most inner-city black children are not privileged enough to have parents who can both afford to stay at home with them, but also have the skills to sufficiently educate them. So Oujima does not provide a collective solution, but the school does provide a collective model for future institutions that have the resources to educate many families' children, not just one. Felicia and Neil have created a blueprint for rank-and-file hip-hop headz to build upon. If Afrocentricity is to continue to be a relevant category for blacks to imagine their identities, it is essential to have some autonomous spaces to cultivate these imaginations. The identity of Black Headz, as we'll see in detail in chapter five, is at a particularly vulnerable state as the Rap Industrial Complex not only offers few positive portrayals and celebration of blackness, but it actually makes a mockery of blacks in a manner that harkens back to minstrel performance in days past.

These Black Headz' model of labor-economy may be the best guide for other satellites in the Hip-Hop Nation where public services are being diminished. Neil and Felicia have not totally removed themselves from the outside world by any means, but they engage it at a level where it can work to strengthen their vision of an independent Hip-Hop Nation, not make themselves more dependent upon it as is true of even the wealthiest of minstrel rapper. The Hip-Hop Nation has long prided itself on hustling, meaning to generate revenue outside of that officially reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), whether this be selling drugs, cutting hair, stripping, selling bootleg DVD's and CD's, or selling music that you created out of the trunk of your car. One way or the other, many in the Hip-Hop Nation feel it is wholly foolish and naïve to depend on America for your daily bread –or much of anything. This independent hustle comes with the expectation that at some point neoliberal capitalism will cut them off. As the whole world saw in New Orleans, waiting on America may leave you sitting restlessly on your roof for days on end. Or if you're like the thousands of Americans that are losing their roofs and their shirts, then you might find yourself like some other New Orleans residents, up shit creek literally without a paddle. So for my research informants in the Hip-Hop Nation, the ultimate goal is to cut America off and be able to live totally independent of the system, before America leaves them out in the cold. But in the meantime they want to benefit from capitalism as much as they can without getting swallowed whole. For many who attempt to navigate along the dangerous borders of the Hip-Hop Nation and the Rap Industrial Complex, this has proven to be quite a balancing act indeed.

Black Headz overwhelmingly held hip-hop to higher standards of behavior and responsibility than a system that they felt long ago abandoned them. The Hip-Hop Nation has no pretense that capitalism can be anything but exploitive, but hip-hop was supposed to be different. Marc says, of blacks responsibility to one another in the Hip-Hop Nation, “hip-hop has the same responsibility whether we artists, whether we consumers, whether we producers, we do have responsibility to the community because we’re making money off of ‘em. We can’t be like other folks who set up shop in our community, then drive out of the community, don’t do business with anybody in the community, suck us dry and then walk away when the milk is gone.” It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that Black Headz identity is constructed strictly by taking an oppositional stance against whites. Much of their focus is actually on purging the black community. Ryan, a career advisor at a community college on the South Side, is explicit in his approach, commenting specifically on the chaos surrounding Hurricane Katrina to highlight Eurostreamed blacks’ negligence for one another, and how they should be held to account by the Hip-Hop Nation.

I think Hurricane Katrina exposed a lot of the in-house problems we got as black people. We can’t blame white people for what they did as far the violence that took place down there. We can blame them for the systemic issues that allowed those conditions to exist. All cramped like that. But at the same time they didn’t pull the trigger. They didn’t commit those acts, murder, little girls getting raped and things like that which is just crazy at a time like that. To extort people, \$10 for a bottle of water. They had a cat there on the news selling bottled water for \$10 a bottle and then you know what they did? They jacked him for it, and they should have. Just crazy stuff. Put it out there in the forefront. The good thing with hip-hop is that we really do some housecleaning. We need to do that. They may be down on Bill Cosby. He’s right to a certain degree. He may not be presenting the message the perfect way but he’s right to a degree. We gotta do some housecleaning. We can’t blame white people for all the shit that’s going down when it’s all said and done. We’re not passive. I hate for people to characterize us as passive like we just lay down. Just like it was some African kings who participated in the slave trade and we just gotta be honest with that, and for black people it’s really hard for them to hear that. Other Jews were involved in the Holocaust. This is not unique to black people, all other oppressed groups have done this as well. Jews participated in other Jews slaughter, so it’s not like this is unique to black people and they cleaned fucking house after WWII and that’s what we need to do as well.

Though they feel connected by a common struggle, Ryan's comments show that some Black Headz clearly viewed themselves as separate from most black folks. In this way I found that there seemed to be a distinct kind of blackness that is appropriate to the Hip-Hop Nation, similar to how there was a type of black identity that was deemed appropriate during the Civil Rights Movement. Jacqueline implicitly did this in our interviews when she spoke of "real" black people. When I asked her about this qualifier, she explained:

A real black person is a person who aware and educated about what it means to be black in America. I think a phony black person is maybe one who grew up in a middle class or even upper class neighborhood and then pretend the experience that the average black person speak of is not a race issue, it's a socio-economic issue. It will always be black or white, I believe, whether you have money or not. Michael Vick knows it. Michael Jackson knows it. Kobe Bryant. O.J. knows it. Ron Artest knows it. Tank Johnson. These are the people that are starting to learn that it's not "because I'm rich, even though I'm black those things don't effect me." It is not just whether you got money or not. It's black and white. That's how it is and how it's gonna be.

Ryan indicates however that class is not the primary determinant of black identity. He says that there are some non-black black people outside of the middle class as well who work against communal values. "There's a war going on," recalls Ryan, whose brother was the victim of gun violence by black gang members. "The War on Terrorism was just getting started around that time (that my brother was shot). They talking about all these damn terrorists in the Middle East. We live next door to them right now. When you guys are letting these guys go early because of overcrowding, they move next door to my mama. The murderer lives across the street from my mama. So we're being terrorized. They asses need to be locked up, they not black people, I don't know what the hell they are. Cause black people that love each other don't do that kind of thing. Just indiscriminately shoot up a house for no reason, that's essentially what they did."

Less important than their skin color, black headz were more concerned with the values that hip-hop headz represented. So in this way, black rappers like 50 Cent were considered outsiders by many of my black headz in spite of their pigmentation, as well as gang bangers and middle class bourgeois blacks.

As we'll see in detail in the section on the Fugees, this profile of the Black Headz should not suggest that all of the Hip-Hop Nation's racial baggage has been shed. There were some Black Headz who did express discomfort at whites intrusion into hip-hop. "I'm really disturbed by that," Jacqueline says of the increased presence of whites at hip-hop shows. "It was black and browns, Latino American and black people. They was speaking out against the oppresioon that blacks and Latinos continuously face, not white kids from suburbia who go to Lane Tech and all these other rich white schools. So to actually see them, to me its' an exploitation of the art and the culture. Some white kids probably know more about hip-hop than I do and its roots and its foundations. But that's what white people do. They get something and they know it because they read about it, cause they studied it from beginning to end and shit, not because they lived it. His knowledge would be artificial in that regard anyway. I lived it."

Despite an unmistakable militant Afrocentricity, most Black Headz rarely brought up sharing space with whites within the Hip-Hop Nation as being problematic. All of the seven Black Headz that I spoke to acknowledged some inherent injustices of the system, and they were very critical of the white-dominated music industry. But most Black Headz were far more focused on trying to get their own metaphorical house in order within the black community. Black Headz, while placing a heavy degree of responsibility on blacks, were also the most explicit of my research respondents in their view that government

played a direct role in the marginalization of black people. Black Headz also seemed to be among the most active in seeking out physical contact through the Hip-Hop Nation. Most made a much more conscious effort to experience hip-hop outside of their homes than most of my research respondents. Additionally, Black Headz were obsessive in comparison to other hip-hop headz about accessing information. While Tech Headz used the internet as a space to become more informed about hip-hop, Black Headz were more likely to talk during our interviews of using the net to access information about the world-at-large. All of the Black Headz that I interviewed said that they made conscious efforts to seek out international news online, particularly focusing on African issues. Additionally, because of their need to engage people directly, they were also more likely than other headz to have experienced some degree of cross-cultural activism. Marc, for example, who worked as an aide to a congressman and also was heavily involved in union work, spoke of networks he had formed in the Latino community in Chicago and in Southwest Texas. Neil and Felicia credited hip-hop specifically with bridging gaps of cultural understanding through hip-hop. In one of the more notable examples from our interview sessions, Felicia spoke of how watching a modern hip-hop adaptation of “A Raisin in the Sun” with a close white friend and her family opened the door to some uncomfortable conversations about race that left both families teary eyed at the end, but more informed about each other’s experience. Black Headz said that hip-hop gave them the space to deal with issues of race in an honest and frank, yet non-confrontational manner. As usual, however, this space was actively carved out by Black Headz on an individual level. It is vital that these spaces continued to be made available publicly so others can have the freedom to fight these battles in a shared space. As cities like Chicago

become more and more segregated, it is less likely that blacks, whites, Asians and Latinos will be afforded opportunities locally in which they can connect. This leaves them in danger of only coming in contact with the black “experience” through the Rap Industrial Complex. This is problematic in that it will reinforce stereotypes outside of the black community. But more troubling for the Hip-Hop Nation is that the minstrel character featured in the Rap Industrial Complex represents a significant assault on the Afrocentric identity of Black Headz that imagine the black experience in a more complex light. Under neoliberalism, however, complexity is not profitable which many of the Pro Headz that I interviewed have found out all too well.

### **4.3 - Pro Headz**

The profitability in these one-dimensional messages of the minstrel rapper (chapter five) in the Rap Industrial Complex have made the commercial terrain particularly difficult for professional headz like Alfonso and Jeff. Professional Headz view the Hip-Hop Nation as a space where they can find sustainable employment. The Rap Industrial Complex makes things especially tough for the Professional Headz of the Hip-Hop Nation who try earnestly to strike the balance between art and commerce. One participant, Jeff, who teaches during the day before moonlighting at night as an MC, has had an opportunity to examine this battle from both sides of the fence between the Rap Industrial Complex and the Hip-Hop Nation, and explains the conundrum that many Pro Headz are presently working against.

Umm because it's like this to me. I just understand capitalism and I understand the rawness of the principle. To be a person with a family you have to be capitalist to a certain extent to survive, which I do. But at the end of the day capitalism -even when I'm flourishing in it -to a righteous person should feel a little wrong. Like (when I'm teaching) in a classroom and I'm looking at 30 kids and I know the capitalistic triangle is gone leave the majority of them out. It's not enough seats at the table to eat. And you want to tell them you all can be the Obama but you all can't, so it hurts. Cause I know that individually we have this freedom and that's what hold us together. We have all these rights of choices but at the end of the day survival of the

fittest. If I gotta get it, somebody else is not gone get it! Now you put so many seats there but I gotta start way back there, you start way up here. So now it's at the point where shit ain't fair. And now I gotta turn and I'm in the back and look who I'm running against? It's my own people. So therefore it's cutthroat back there cause we scrambling for these last seats. The people that started up there, they not as cut throat with us cause they don't have to be. "We know we got seats, we gone be there early." It's five seats left and it's 100 of us and what we gone do? Nigga we gone crawl, kill, steal, anything. That's what's wrong with capitalism to me.

And yet by his own admission he is forced to compete in this rat race and play his part to sustain it. For today's Pro Head like Jeff, this presents a particularly difficult challenge because this subset of the community that I studied often times imagine that the only way to achieve commercial success is through compromising the values of the Hip-Hop Nation. Yet they persist nonetheless against great odds because they feel that they are morally compelled to do so. Jeff, a married father of two, with a Masters Degree in education, also battles internally with whether or not he wouldn't be better off exclusively pursuing market opportunities in the mainstream. This has more perceived security than selling conscious hip-hop to what he feels is largely a brain-dead populace. "Sometimes I get mad at myself," Jeff recalls as he strokes his nappy beard reflectively. "If it wasn't for this hip-hop shit I'd have a Ph.D. and a law degree. I would be way further. But my mission in life has always been to reach the masses of people some kind of way and affect the most change. We live in these bodies for whatever amount of time that we have and it's a world out here and we given this space on this planet for a reason or a purpose. Some people choose to stay to themselves and worry about they small little circle, 360 degrees and that's cool for them. Intrinsically inside me, that's not cool for me. I don't feel satisfied if I can't reach out and touch other lives. That's why I stick in it because I feel like it's a calling and a gift."

However, this gift is not well rewarded these days. Whether real or not, all of the Professional Headz that I spoke with said that they were acutely aware of the market

demands that called for them to undermine the values of the Hip-Hop Nation. While neoliberalism's (the dominant western philosophy of the past 30 years that mark hip hop's ascension) primary appeal has been that open markets know best, Jeff's experiences suggests that the Rap Industrial Complex is anything but a free market. Perhaps nowhere has this been more true than the publicly-licensed radio airwaves where Interscope and Sony BMG have been some of the more notable record labels that have paid radio stations to have their artists song's played repeatedly over several weeks (Mazaheri 2004, Gross 2005, Starkman 2005). One of the driving forces of record sales is to have your song be included in a radio countdown which most fans believe are connected to listeners call-ins, a myth that Jeff said was broken down for him during a recent visit to Chicago's leading radio station, WGCI. "It's not for the fact that it's a lack of talented MC's out there. But what it is, the powers that be telling you what you gone like and what you not gone like. For example I'm in GCI and they interviewing me for my song and when the commercial break, I said, "tell me this man. Is the top nine at 9 real? Like, is this really the top nine most requested songs?" They laughed at me and said "hell naw, people pay for slots." It's influential though into a consumer mind. If I tell you that a Camry is the number one rated car, or this is the number one rated cereal or this is the number one rated thing, the human psyche gravitate towards what we think that people like. What they do now - a record company, whoever at the top making these decisions- can put that number one and this number two and put Common way out the top ten. Therefore the songs that's more popular in people's minds are going to continue to be more popular and you beat the people over the subconscious with it and then people are going to gravitate to it. And who makes those decisions?" Thus far, we have

discussed the Rap Industrial Complex in the abstract but Jeff's anecdote reveals that this behemoth presents some real-world consequences for those who try and live according to hip-hop principles such as self-determination and maintaining one's integrity at (quite literally) all costs.

Without answering this rhetorical question about "who makes those decisions," Jeff suggests that the people making those decisions are not individuals who have an interest in sustaining hip-hop, but only utilize the culture for its profit potential. Clearly, Professional Headz like Jeff are not immune to profit, but are very concerned about who controls the purse strings. As Felicia and Neil's case showed us, it is not individual pockets of wealth that the Hip-Hop Nation needs, it needs some self-controlled institutional power. Rappers in the Rap Industrial Complex have jobs, Pro Headz mainly have their ambitions set on being totally independent and not forced to rely on which way the market winds blow.

Rappers rap for themselves, but Pro Headz in my research expressed an interest in using their art to educate. This education can come in many forms from how to manage money well to how not to surround yourself with snitches if you're selling drugs. But Pro Headz such as Jeff felt it was their duty to leave their listeners with some information that could help make their lives better. For Jeff this has frequently meant ruffling some feathers and going against the grain like he did with some of his more notable songs including one song where he condemns the materialistic contradictions and questionable history of Christmas. And another song, which offered a sharp critique against Arab businessmen who profited off of black vice such as alcoholism, caused such a stir that

there was an organized movement by Chicago's Arab-American community to have the song banned from local stores and radio.

Though Jeff is highly critical of media elites who view hip-hop as a disposable commodity for not allowing more balance in the messages disseminated to the public, he is also critical of a section of hip-hop headz who he feels have stunted hip-hop's growth because they were originally too protective of the culture and alienated those who wanted to carve out their own niche inside of the Hip-Hop Nation. Speaking directly to some of the elitism found among some of hip-hop's talented tenth, Jeff says, "Part of that is the hip-hop headz fault. And just keeping it real, even though I'm a head. It's really our fault. I'm gone take it there too. What we did we alienated a certain whole type of music from certain regions and we regionalized and typified it to the point where we made them feel like outcasts. And they said "fuck you we going all the way there even more."

The Pro Headz had the luxury of thinking actively about the dynamics of hip-hop culture which contributed to them being among the most philosophical of hip-hop headz when assessing the Rap Industrial Complex. Not only do they feel that the RIC undermines the culture economically, but the process of limiting consumer market choice has also undermined some of the democratic notions of the Hip-Hop Nation. Jeff explains, saying: "That's why Viacom bought off (the video) jukebox so quick cause back then they actually had to play what the people wanted. It was shifting in what was the most popular. So immediately they take the request shows out of people's hands. Now what they do is they totally take democracy out of it and it's just capitalism."

This lack of infrastructure that would allow voices internal to the culture to be projected out has had important implications in how the narrative of race has been shaped

in America. The Hip-Hop Nation has some diverse views to contribute to this discussion that often get shut out. Jeff links most of the responsibility for these images outside of the Hip-Hop Nation but again lays it in the hands of those who have little interest in portraying blacks in a popular light. Jeff said that the lack of institutional capital held by the Hip-Hop Nation came to light during the Don Imus controversy when Imus was largely able to shape the parameters of the discussion. He comments: "After the Don Imus thing, not only could you let that cracker just shift the weight -and he's a cracker, not all white people are crackers to me, but he's a cracker in a true sense of the word- for him to push the weight from himself and make black people intrinsically turn on each other, and we start to point blame - like hip-hop is the cause of all our social ills- that's asinine to me." This lack of institutional control makes it that much more vital that Pro Headz offer some alternative messages than are presented in the mainstream. Alfonso goes as far as contending that Professional Headz have a responsibility to project images that speak to working-class sensibilities. But working class values don't sell. Selling American dreams of diamonds, big butts and flashy cars does. Big business got hip-hop by such a stranglehold right now with the messages that they push, with the people they put in the limelight, with the disrespect for the culture and the artform and what it was created for." Alfonso said. "Hip-hop was created by poor people, not to put it on anybody's race. This was poor people's music! And they changed it. We took five seconds of this song that was awesome that made the party go wild and turned it into a two minute movie that we could see and understand because it was our next door neighbor telling the story. It was for us, it was all about us. It was all for us. And when

any big business see anything that's making money they put whatever they can into it to get the money because that's what they in business for."

Jeff says that it is important to capture the sense of struggle in the music, a theme that is noticeably absent in the Rap Industrial Complex where all the problems have been magically worked out and now it's time to celebrate. He says that the absence of struggle from the music goes against what attracted so many to it in the first place:

Hip-hop at its core is rebellious towards institutions. And its a voice to the people where they feel like they don't have a voice. Whether it's Public Enemy and " a letter from the government the other day" or it's the Fresh Prince and "Parents Don't Understand" both have the same elements where it's an establishment and it's me. And it's different levels to that. Everbody can get it to they own degree of struggle whether it's a kid with domineering parents or a black person that see the police and get scared, it's the same emotion. You can't tell someone who parent is hard on them that they don't feel it to the same degree as someone who walking down the street and gotta look over their back cause the police just shot three people last month. To each person inside their paradigm it's the same experience, the same adrenaline, the same emotion. That's why hip- hop is so successful, you can be in Paris, you can be in London, you can be in Zimbabwe and you still feel what Tupac is saying. You not relating to his personal struggle, but all music is energy and you feel that energy and you attached to that energy.

The Pro Head is immersed in the history, the range and purpose of hip-hop music beyond its function as a consumable good. Pro Headz in the Hip-Hop Nation differ from the typical minstrel rapper in that their ambition is not to reach a mass audience, but rather to develop an intimate relationship with a very specific network of individuals who share their values. Pro Headz were most explicit among my research informants in describing the Rap Industrial Complex because most of my respondents in this category had experienced it directly one way or the other. Pro Headz were like some of the Refugees that I spoke with in that they took great pride in the efforts that they took to earn embodied capital. Finally, while most tried to maintain their artistic integrity, they did acknowledge that the market has some impact on what they create and that they are forced to conform in several ways. Hip-Hop MC's play an important role as the culture's

griots who carry on the history and principles of the Hip-Hop Nation from generation to generation. But with more MC's finding that promoting working class values of self respect and determination aren't profitable, there is a very real concern that much of hip-hop's rich history could be lost. The Rap Industrial Complex has no investment in this history, thus it is becoming a disposable aspect of the culture.

#### **4.4 - Hip-Hop Fundamentalists**

To be sure, there were some respondents in my research who did display this level of protectionism over the music. For while the fruits of hip-hop have proven bountiful for many former Professional Headz, sharing hip-hop with the world has meant some concessions at points, something that my research participants like Hank have a difficult time stomaching. *Hip-Hop Fundamentalists* are highly critical of the way that hip-hop has evolved away from principles associated with political activism. One of the primary ways that Hip-Hop Fundamentalists differ with the Black Headz is that they are far more open to cultural diversity of hip-hop, even seeing hip-hop as a site of meeting points for the various races. However, like orthodox members of any faith, they are resistant to change and feel that the more "worldly" hip-hop becomes, the more the culture is tainted. The Hip-Hop Fundamentalists are particularly clear about excluding those who are not fully immersed in the history and folklore of hip-hop culture. An anecdote that is illustrative of this came from 28-year-old Hank, who does clerical work at a downtown law firm. He became his most animated during our interview when he brought up Chicago rapper Lupe Fiasco's detachment from hip-hop's history, which Hank says is every hip-hop headz duty to become acquainted with.

“I can’t believe that Lupe Fiasco didn’t know the words to A Tribe Called Quest’s “Electric Relaxation,”” Hank says of the song released in 1993 when Lupe was about 10-years-old. “I was astonished. How do you not know the words to that song? Being that Lupe Fiasco is supposed to be quote-unquote hip-hop, and real, I just thought everyone would know the words to A Tribe Called Quest, especially young black people.”

Fundamentalists commonly expressed similar frustration with those who they claimed to be hip-hop but didn’t possess the required embodied capital. Hank’s comments suggest that Lupe is less hip-hop than headz like himself because the critically-acclaimed

Chicago rapper has not made efforts to seek out this history. In another sharp contrast to the Black Headz, Hank even goes as far to say that those individuals who participate in hip-hop culture outside of America often have a greater respect for this culture, and work harder to acquire the requisite embodied capital, than the black people who helped create it, saying, “I guarantee you they know (the lyrics in London) because they want to know. Lupe said he had no intention of going and listening to the album with the faces on it.

(Midnight Marauders)” For the Hip-Hop Fundamentalist, respect for history and the past is crucially important to your identity. This cadre of hip-hop headz contrast themselves with those who access hip-hop through the Rap Industrial Complex that only considers present-day market considerations.

Hip-Hop Fundamentalists were much more likely than other participants to hold the media to account for discrediting who they felt were authentic representatives of hip-hop culture. Their existence is perilous when pitted against the Rap Industrial Complex that only weighs present-day, immediate market considerations. This kind of cultural capital that Hank says Lupe lacks can’t be provided by BET, but has to be earned within

the culture. And anyone who has paid their dues in his view would know the words to the song and its importance within the context of the culture. But while Hank indicates that this is a matter of personal choice for rap fans, the reality is that many of the more progressive hip-hop elements that Hank preferred are not given mainstream access if my analysis of BET featured in chapter five is any indication. Not all black kids are working with the same choices. The Rap Industrial Complex doesn't emphasize a collective black consciousness or a shared hip-hop legacy, but instead provide isolated snapshots of life with no coherent pattern other than that which emphasizes going to the mall.

Fundamentalists imagine themselves as ones who are willing to make the commitment in time and effort to get as much from the culture and music as possible. The Rap Industrial Complex serves hip-hop in small itemized portions that asks little of the listeners, something that Hip-Hop Fundamentalists say contrast greatly with the value system of hip-hop that demands dual participation by both listener and sound provider alike. It is among this group of hip-hop headz where embodied capital is the most treasured value. Hip-Hop Fundamentalists expressed a general contempt for those who they felt touched the culture from a safe, sanitized distance. While Black Headz value knowledge of the African diaspora, Fundamentalists prioritize knowledge of hip-hop culture itself. In their view, you can only gain this knowledge by getting your hands dirty in the grimy underbelly of the hip-hop underground. Only there could one learn the requisite language, values and rituals of the Hip-Hop Nation. The trouble for Fundamentalists is that increasingly there is no "there" there.

All of this talk of embodied capital is not to suggest that objectified capital didn't have some importance for the Hip-Hop Fundamentalist as well. While Ronny informs me

early in our interview that he considers “myself a lot more hip hop than the next man,” after some time it becomes clear that objectified capital was critical in quantifying his statement. Ronny indicated that his affinity for artists such as Jehru the Damaja, Black Moon, and Ed OG gave him greater credibility than someone who purchased a Hurricane Chris or Soulja Boy CD. In fact Ronny even investigated my own cultural competence when he asked if I possessed Ras Kas 1996 album, *Soul on Ice*, in my own vast collection. Naturally I did. Ronny revealed later that this allowed him to be more at ease with the interview, though he didn’t query me about whether or not I actually understood and was intimately familiar with the album. “That’s one of the best albums ever made,” Ronny told me. “If I’m gone do an interview on hip-hop and you didn’t know about that album, I’d probably walk out the door.” And while Ronny tries as long as he can to display the openmindedness that is often associated with hip-hop, before long it becomes clear that he has designed a value-laden hierarchy, revealing that he could not even conceive of having close friends who don’t strongly identify with hip-hop culture. Ronny also makes strong generational distinctions in terms of hip-hop expression, referring to today’s modern music as microwaved hip-hop for its tendency to be quickly served to the public. Moreover this implies that much like the microwave cut down on a previously laborious process, microwaved hip-hop has made this process easier for listeners. “I think it’s a lot more simple today, a lot less complex, I can’t front, I think the beats for Soulja Boy are dope, I can understand people going into the club, and dancing to that, I really can. These cats make clubby, repetitive, sound good, good hook, good on-your-ringtone music, whereas making a concept song like “Nature of the Threat” (by Ras Kas where he offers a sharp and heavily detailed critique of the last 5,000 years of European culture),

making concept song like “Stolen Moments” on Common album where they stole the shit out of his crib, is a lot more difficult to do. Shit like that take a lot more work to do, and that’s not necessarily what people appreciate it. Our society is more quick, simple get to the point, be there. Whereas some shit you have to sit down, listen to and analyze- I think it’s indicative of our society as a whole. Everything boom, boom, boom. Quicker, faster, microwave, boom then you got it.” Much like a microwave produced meal, which can certainly be preferable to some tastes than a homecooked meal, Ronny’s point in referencing much modern rap music as microwaved hip-hop related not so much to his personal opinion of the music, as much as it is what he views are the efforts that went into producing the final product. A microwave meal could potentially taste better, though rare. But the homecooked meal would have taken more time and effort. This effort makes one product superior according to Ronny as he makes clear when I pressed him on the matter, saying: “Fuck that. You gone sit here and tell me it’s harder to do “Soulja Boy” than “Nature of the Threat?” Get the fuck out of here! That’s exactly what I say to that. I don’t think I need to go into some intelligent, intricate answer to that question. You want to hear “Verbal Intercourse” and then you want to hear fucking “Hey Ba-Ba?” Come on man, get the fuck out of here. I say go somewhere man, go watch “The Parkers” or some shit man. Get the fuck out of here with that shit. That’s like a waste of my time justifying that shit man. I mean shit, that’s like saying to me, the Bulls and Dunbar High is the same. It’s basketball. But that don’t mean the quality is the same. They both dribbling the ball. They both shooting. But one is lot fucking better.” Ronny’s point, while comical, reveals a serious point about the importance of investing time in the culture both from a production and a consumer standpoint. This time investment is something that many

Tech Headz increasingly have difficulty accruing. Ronny says that the technology that the Tech Headz so heavily rely on to access hip-hop has played a large role in limiting the way hip-hop is experienced and identified. “I think that (the messages) changed due to the easy accessibility to gain music. There used to be a time when some hot shit was out, you had to buy it, you couldn’t download it, you couldn’t steal it, you couldn’t do nothing but buy the fucking album. It’s not like to hear Pharoahe music’s you got to buy it, you can download the shit, you can do whatever and hear his music. If we didn’t have the internet download shit, you’d see cats like Pharoahe and Dilla selling a lot fucking more records, a lot more records. People would be willing go out to spend that money cause that’s the only way they can get their hands on it.”

Despite this, Fundamentalists were perhaps even more likely than the Tech Headz to have consumption play an instrumental role in shaping their hip-hop identity. Hip-Hop Fundamentalists were much more likely, for example, to use fashion to distinguish their identity from the Rap Industrial Complex and other hip-hop frauds. “One thing I can say is that my fashion trend hasn’t really changed,” said Corey. “I think it stayed the same. How hip-hop was one way and now it’s this way. Not me. I stayed the same throughout that whole thing. I never really got into the jersey thing, that was never my thing. Just some tight polos and a sweater vest or something. Niggas used to clown me like “you still on that Bill Cosby shit?” That’s just me, that’s what I do. Things go back and forth from the masses’ perspectives. I can’t do the tight shirt thing. I don’t ever remember that being in. I’m not into the tight jeans, with your pants tucked into your shoes, with the tongues hanging out of your shoes.”

While Tech Headz said that the time commitment needed to collectively engage hip-hop was their primary pitfall, for the Hip-Hop Fundamentalists they seemed to say that their withdrawal from hip-hop's public square is more closely related to cost and quality of experience. As has all too often been the case, this impacted the ways in which they collectively engaged with hip-hop. Corey, for example, no longer feels the public spaces appropriated for hip-hop any longer belong to him. Yet Corey thought the spaces in which people gathered were also instrumental in crafting a hip-hop identity. Finally, the kind of cultural capital that Hank spoke of can best be gained in these settings which my participants say are becoming more scarce due to a lack of commercial appeal.

#### **4.5 - Tech Headz**

Open-mindedness and a willingness to explore different visions were common in my study of the Hip-Hop Nation. Most headz were like Aramis in that they were quick to explain, for example, that they were in no position to adjudicate who should and who should not be a part of the Hip-Hop Nation. Additionally, they were averse to categorizing hip-hop headz altogether, insisting that categories set up the kind of boxed-in restrictions that go against hip-hop's edict of open, free-expression. Despite these disclaimers that were found consistently in my fieldwork, my research informants categorized hip-hop headz throughout my interviews.

Aramis herself is categorized in my work as a *Tech Head* who these days comes in contact with hip-hop culture generally through her computer screen and rarely spoke of shared space with other hip-hop headz. In this way, a question that I was left with is will these types of hip-hop headz fade away if their computer is taken from them? Aramis said that the cost effectiveness of accessing hip-hop culture via her computer has become

a necessity in recent years as she has felt her economic belt tighten considerably. “I don’t really go out to any spots that are geared towards hip-hop,” Aramis says. “I used to back in the day, I used go to the Warehouse. They’d have these breakdancing contests, the freestyle on the mic contests. They’d be hosted by Ang 13, those were pretty cool. I kind of miss stuff like that, going to the underground parties. But I haven’t done that in a long time.” Several of my participants discussed the economic crisis specifically in transitioning them into this more personalized relationship with hip-hop, away from a hip-hop identity that was reaffirmed in public spaces. Ironically I found that Tech Headz expressed many views in regard to outside intrusion of the Hip-Hop Nation that were similar to those expressed by Fundamentalists. With Tech Headz, it can be argued that by engaging hip-hop through a controlled environment it leaves them less open to changes in the culture.

Of greater concern is that Aramis and other headz have become so accustomed to this disengagement that many hip-hop headz have discontinued actively seeking out spaces like Sub-T (chapter six) and are becoming too comfortable in isolated or controlled aspects of hip-hop. Most tech headz are like Hilda in that they see the internet as a healthy alternative to what they feel is a filtered medium such as radio and television. She defends her lack of collective engagement with the quite legitimate claim that there is some agency in this process by refusing to accept the whitewashed imagery of the Rap Industrial Complex. “Why I like myspace, there is so much music. You can go from Europe to London, it’s so much music. That was the foundation of where it started from. It’s soooo much music. Like it’s not MTV or Booty Every Time, aka BET. It’s other things that you can get besides that.” Hilda credits online sites such as Spikicker,

Freedom News.com and Pandora as informing her of American artists such as Murs, Little Brother and Afu-Ra as well as MC's from the Dominican, Palestine and Japan who she says she certainly would not have been exposed to otherwise. She also says that she rarely purchases actual CD's, choosing instead to download almost all of her music online. Participants such as Hilda actually say that websites such as Pandora allow her to have more control than relying on private radio. To be sure, filters still remain as you can only access whatever Pandora might have in their library which would certainly exclude some local artists, but one has more agency than they would with public radio, and are free from advertisements as well. This certainly represents a path towards greater hip-hop agency but it leaves something to be desired in terms of creating community, though there is some degree of that as well. And even a Tech Head like Hilda acknowledges that even the net is not free from watered-down mainstream sensibilities, saying of the online site, All Hip-Hop.com for example, "That was pretty good, but they started getting more into like "he said she said stuff." Like everything it starts out good but eventually it beomes too commercial. Why would I care who Nas' baby mama slept with? It gets into the whole gossiping thing."

My interviews with Darryl also revealed that while many Tech Headz can go online to reaffirm their own values and hip-hop identity, the internet has not been a tool that they have used to directly seek out community. Darryl says of his online hip-hop experiences "I'm pretty much just a reader, I don't dialogue as much as many of the people who visit the site. I don't really have time for that, but it takes nothing to go up and down the list to see what's going on. If anything pique my interest I'll look at what's being said." The time crunch that makes every second of the day a valued commodity

was described as more of a constraint to Tech Headz formation of a hip-hop community, even more than cost. This makes the establishment of hip-hop enterprises vital that could allow for the cultivation of production models that don't require such fixed time schedules from its workers as is demanded under neoliberal capitalistic frameworks.

Not coincidentally I found that women were more likely to be Tech Headz than men, perhaps because the public spaces of the Hip-Hop Nation are not as accommodating to them as they should be, though this certainly doesn't explain the preponderance of whites in many of the spaces I ventured into who were often subjected to vicious racial slurs.

#### **4.6 - The Refugees**

*I never would've dreamed in a million years I'd see,  
 So many motherfuckin' people who feel like me,  
 who share the same views and the same exact belief  
 It's like a fuckin' army marchin' in back of me  
 So many lives I touch, so much anger aimed, in no particular direction, just sprays and sprays  
 And straight through your radio waves it plays and plays  
 'till it stays stuck in your head for days and days  
 Who would of thought, standing in this mirror bleachin' my hair  
 with some peroxide, Reaching for a t-shirt to wear  
 that I would catapult to the forefront of rap like this  
 How could I predict my words would have an impact like this  
 I must've struck a chord, with somebody up in the office  
 cause congress keeps telling me I ain't causin' nuthin' but problems  
 And now they're sayin' I'm in trouble with the government  
 I'm lovin' it  
 I shoveled shit all my life and now I'm dumping it  
 on white America  
 -Eminem, White America-*

While many mentioned hip-hop's inclusiveness as an open space, it seems clear from my research that there is a certain segment of this population whose contributions to hip-hop culture are not valued equally – mainly anyone not a black male. Though they credit hip-hop for being far more inclusive than the United States of America, my four non-black participants said that they have experienced the kind of second class feeling

within the Hip Hop Nation due to Hip Hop's dominant black ideology. Geovanny, a Puerto Rican MC who lives on the South Side, said of non-blacks who try and make it as rappers, for example, "It's like the white boys who rap. With the Beastie Boys it was always *the white boys* who can rap. It wasn't like that with Run DMC, Kurtis Blow like "Oh those *black* guys can rap." It's like "oh those guys can rap" Hip-hop brought its racial type of biases. Why would it be a big deal that Big Pun went platinum? Cause he was a Latino rapper. You just can't be a regular motherfucker when you're a different race in hip-hop. People might think I suck for saying that, but that's how it is. To this day being a Latino MC -and because I'm pale they say that white boy is cold- and then when they find out I'm Latino, they're like "wow he's even Latino."

Kerry, a 32-year-old white male who works for an international charity when he isn't DJ'ing, has a more philosophical take on this expectation of non-blacks in hip-hop, arguing even that the gender bias in the Hip-Hop Nation is more pronounced than racial ones. Kerry suggested that he feels right at home as a white boy in a culture ideologically dominated by blacks because he paid his dues within hip-hop even more than many blacks. "I remember going to De La Soul shows back in the day and me and my friend being like the only white people there," he recalls of times before whites began to be the majority at hip-hop shows. Kerry does acknowledge the racial differences and the tendency of some blacks to be very protective with a culture that they feel is being stolen from them, but he also feels that the merit of your skills as an MC, DJ or breakdancer, or investing time to gain embodied capital can overcome any inherent racial bias. "I've seen both sides of it," Kerry told me as he waded through a wave of vinyl records unlike anything I'd ever seen. "I've been approached by some people when I'm DJ'ing like

“white dude what are you doing?” Or like “wow this white kid’s really good, I can’t believe it.” But I just take it. I don’t even think about. I know that it’s pointed out, but I haven’t thought about it that much. I don’t know. I don’t really think about it like that. Most of the time it’s just “this guy’s good.””

Although my research allowed me to speak to respondents of mixed race, as well as Puerto Rican, Belizean and Panamanian decent, most discussions on race centered on black and white. What I found in these discussions is that, like most of the issues being worked through inside the Hip-Hop Nation, race relations offered much in the way of complexity. One of the more interesting turns that this dialogue on race took in the Hip-Hop Nation involved the roles that whites should be allowed to play in national leadership. Most all my participants acknowledged that blacks are predominant in hip-hop. Some white participants even suggested that hip-hop’s raw, uncut blackness is what attracted them to the culture in the first place. And in seeing the open minded views towards interracial dating, global politics and the importance of communal goals I think an argument can be made that whites within the Hip-Hop Nation possess a broader racial understanding than both whites and blacks who still take their cues from the United States. While most blacks are accepting of sharing space with whites in hip-hop, many of my participants were cautious about yielding too much control over the culture to whites, as many whites who have participated in the culture to turn a profit via the Rap Industrial Complex have not always been as supportive of the culture as they should. And while blacks are open to participation by all groups, some of my informants also felt that whites could never imagine the intensity of emotion that blacks felt for the Hip-Hop Nation

because many of its messages were detached from the white experience. Bobbi, a Masters Degree candidate in Engineering from UIC said, in expressing this sentiment, “I think to fully understand and have a good grasp on the roots of hip-hop you need to be black. To kind of be able to really feel the music and feel some of the messages, to be able to kind of identify with it. Cause a lot of the songs is a lot of shit that I’m going through or witness or seen and I can readily identify with that.” One of the reasons that many of my participants said that they were drawn to the work of the militant rap duo Dead Prez is because it aggressively confronts the white establishment. For Black Headz like Bobbi, groups like Dead Prez play an important role in articulating the frustration and tension that silently bubbles under the surface in America. In the Hip-Hop Nation, these issues are articulated in extreme terms that present a unique challenge for whites who try and find a space for themselves in the Hip-Hop Nation. I reference Kerry here at length, whose experience at a Dead Prez concert in New York shows how whites in the Hip-Hop Nation sometimes still have to struggle to be seen as individuals and not part of the white power structure. Kerry’s experience shows that his racial understanding is aided by being forced to confront situations that will make most whites uncomfortable, and that they rarely have to experience in America. Kerry’s experiences, and the embodied capital that came with paying dues, is something that many whites who access hip-hop through the Rap Industrial Complex have not earned. Though Kerry shows us that this transforming of racial understanding can often be a baptism by fire, he believes that these spaces within the Hip-Hop Nation offer more honest confrontations with race. Recalling one experience, Kerry says:

Like 8 years ago, maybe Dead Prez had been out a couple of years. I was at the Rock Steady anniversary in New York and they were one of the groups performing. And I was there kind of with a mix of people I think. I was the only white kid, and there were a few black women, a couple of dudes, a Mexican dude.

Dead Prez got on, did a couple of songs and then decided it was time for them to preach a little bit. I was aware of what they were about, but at the same time I never took offense to it. It's music, everyone can say what they want to say. If anything I didn't like the generalizations and that's exactly what they did that day. "Kill white people and you gotta kill white people" and all that. And this is like the hundredth show I been too and this is the first time I'm hearing something like this. And I'm like you've got to be kidding me. These dudes are crazy. I bought their album. I was pretty turned off by it. And to this day it's hard for me to go out and get into some Dead Prez stuff. When I'm spinning I'll still play "it's bigger than hip hop," I'll play some "Mind Sex" but it's hard for me to say I want to buy their album. Later I thought about it. What they're saying, it's a little extreme but I know there's frustration, I know there's anger. I would rather have them tell me how they feel than have them tell me everything is all good. So at the end of the day I was like it's cool but at the same time I haven't been dying to get into Dead Prez' mixtapes. The Dead Prez thing was such as- the way that they presented their platform. "It's revolution, put your fists up and take these white people out." Come on. Where you gonna take me? This is ridiculous. I don't really hear that with Common, Dilla or whoever when they make comments about white people. But now I have a feeling that (Dead Prez) not talking about me, they're talking about other people in the white community and I can point people out I know that fall into that. They talking about someone but they not talking about me.

Like any nation however, there are some that will never be moved beyond a fundamentalist position in spite of Kerry's track record of commitment to national ideals. While I did not find her view to be the norm in my study of the Hip-Hop Nation, it would be too simple to merely dismiss participants like Bobbi or Dead Prez as racist. Their reaction is a response to a long history in the United States of blacks opening their cultural doors to whites who have snuck out the backdoor to pawn everything that wasn't nailed down. The exploitive nature of capitalism continues to play a role in individual's racial understanding within the Hip-Hop Nation. If the Hip-Hop Nation is truly to form the kind of utopian society that many of my participants imagine, they have some grave challenges ahead of them in shaking away the racial baggage that forces individuals into a selfish survival mode where they view their fellow man as a suspicious competitor for precious resources.

A dissenting view from Bobbi is taken by Ryan, a Black Head who says that this white appropriation of the culture is acceptable so long as everyone knows who they are. Most are like Ryan in believing that so long as whites show a healthy respect to the black innovators of hip-hop, and do not try and behave in a stereotypically black manner, that

they are more than welcome to share in the culture. “I mean that doesn’t really bother me, white people. I was real suspect with whole the Eminem thing, I ain’t gone lie, I was real suspect about that. But then he had people like Dr. Dre vouching for him, and they don’t just vouch for anybody. I was suspect at first but he sold me. And cause lyrically some of the things that he was talking about- even though it was related to what he was doing, I couldn’t relate to some of this stuff- but still lyrically (it was dope). And one thing I gotta give the white boy is that he knows he’s a white boy. You can tell he been around black people, but he ain’t one of them white people that’s a caricature like the K Fed thing. One of those like Vanilla Ice. That grain of white boy.”

This was the common view, as most blacks in my sample welcomed others inside of Hip-Hop’s borders, which distinguishes the Hip-Hop Nation from the country of the culture’s birth which is becoming increasingly xenophobic. For most of my participants, hip-hop has helped facilitate connections and intersections across race that may not have been formed otherwise in a political environment that has long thrived off of divisiveness. White participants like Kerry said that some of the vivid descriptions of poverty, crime and injustice offered by groups like Dead Prez made him more empathetic to racial injustice in America (and in general) than he feels he would have been otherwise. “It opened me up to so much and definitely broke down a lot of the stereotypes that you have.” Kerry told me. “A lot of people say it builds up the stereotypes, but that’s only if you hear the music at face value. (The more you get into it) you start to realize there’s a lot more in it. You see all this stuff that goes into it and you meet people. That had a huge impact on us when we were growing up. We didn’t really care who was going to be there (at the live shows), what kind of people were going to be

there, that's fine, whatever. They like the same artist, that's cool. I met people of all different types and I was like wow that's when I realized that hip-hop is a beautiful thing and it brings people together." The Hip-Hop Nation has worked more to bring people together rather than play upon their differences so much that Hank said that "hip-hop has brought together more races than the Olympics."

No doubt, the Hip-Hop Nation is rich in racial and cultural diversity, yet internally and externally it is viewed as being *of* the black community. Whether or not hip-hop is a black culture in the imagination of the Hip-Hop Nation, it certainly is viewed that way by most Americans who reside outside of it. Whites who pledge allegiance to hip-hop such as Kerry are often made to feel as if they are honorary niggers in America. Kerry's recollection of his formative years as a teenager in hip-hop gives a clear demonstration of the social sanctions endured by those who don't fit into the neat box of white Americana:

I had a baseball bat in the trunk of my car for my junior and senior year. I got harassed because of the fact that I listened to rap music. I was harassed by a ton of people. The hockey players and the football players. They were dead set on making our lives miserable because we listened to rap music and they definitely would throw around the term wigger. And it wasn't until my senior year that I heard the word and I was just like "wait a second, you gotta be kidding me. You're taking one really bad racial slur and you're trying to turn that around and make it something bad on me too?" All over music I listen to or whatever? Obviously you have problem. You have a town with like 20,000 people when I was there, all white people who have been living in all white areas their entire lives. They don't even know how to address people from other cultures. It's like ridiculous. It was really strange back then. In high school I didn't know how to deal with it. We were back in 8<sup>th</sup> grade wearing Malcolm X t-shirts, BDP "Stop the Violence," Martin Luther King, all because we got this out of the music. My father would ask me, "what do you want your dad to get you when I go to New York?" "African Medallion." He's like "why?" "Dude, that's what I want. Q-Tip's wearing one, I gotta have one." I was in 8th grade, I'm like reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. And people are like "what are you doing?" I'm trying to figure out what's going on in this world and to this day that's the same way I'm thinking. Listening to stuff like X Clan, Poor Righteous Teachers. It was almost like they not talking about what you're going through. It was a world that still existed, it's just not the world I'm experiencing. But since it seemed so out there, I was like I gotta find out what the hell they talking about. So people were like "why is a little white kid reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*?" I'm just trying to figure out what's going on you know. Hip-hop presented a totally different world than where I was coming from. But it really made me understand a little more. A lot of people don't have it as good as I have it. It changes the way you look at different things

Kerry makes no pretensions that his plight is like other blacks who deal with this type of bigotry on a regular basis in America, but his experience shows the difficulty for many to be treated both as hip-hop and an American. Through his affiliation with hip-hop he was made to feel abnormal for embracing a black culture created in America that was viewed as alien and foreign in his predominantly white community. Whites such as Kerry, by holding onto their hip-hop identity through the pubescent pressure of adolescence and the safe conformity of adulthood, demonstrate a commitment to the Hip-Hop Nation that differs with the temporary binds of the Rap Industrial Complex. Kerry's sojourn through hip-hop demonstrates how invaluable the Hip-Hop Nation is as a space for facilitating greater racial cohesion and true understanding.

Kerry's experiences also show that despite discussions of multiculturalism, the blackness of hip-hop culture is difficult to ignore when one considers some of the cultural artifacts that he identified as most connecting him to the Hip-Hop Nation. Kerry did not get inspired to read Shakespeare, Emerson or Hemmingway as he came of age in the Hip-Hop Nation. He was drawn, and felt an intimate connection, to cultural artifacts that are typically associated with the black diaspora. The African medallions, the dreds worn by kids in Japan, the red, black & green color schemes, the style, the language consistently observed in my field research was derived from black people. Yet when whites or other non-blacks made use of these cultural artifacts, I did not get a sense that they were forcing this. These objects were as much a part of their national identity as an American Indian who roots for John Wayne in the movies. (Shively 1992) In this way, my white participants imagine a very different America than their parents likely did.

The meaning of black and white, while still problematic in its own ways, is being transformed in the Hip-Hop Nation at a level of complexity that is rarely given forum in the United States. One of the more intelligent descriptions of this process came from MURS (Making Underground Shit), a mildly eccentric MC from Los Angeles. On his song, "Black Skinned White Girls," MURS describes two women who are battling the limitations of race in a postmodern world. In verse one of this song Murs begins:

She got that mocha chino baby on the back of the bus/If you close your eyes and listen she would be one of us/Never did trust, her family at home/So she kicked it in the hood/Raised herself on her own/She talked with that tone but she white to the bone/You would swear she was black if you spoke on the phone/Some say it's overblown but she don't give a damn/All the black girls think that she want they man/But it's not your fault they attracted to you/That you blessed and you got as much back as you do/Most white boys say that you way too thick/And some brothas might say you the number one pick/You say "GIRRRRL!", roll ya eyes, twist ya neck/But it comes from the soul, You don't mean no disrespect/And even when they check you, you just keep it movin/Cuz in your heart you feel you ain't got nothin to be provin.

The song's chorus speaks to an increasingly more common reality for many Americans, and people throughout the world, who don't feel fully at home in the so-called black or white worlds: Whether Chocolate or Vanilla/Or ya somewhere in between/Like cappuccino, mocha, or a caramel queen/Rejected by the black, not accepted by the white world/And this is dedicated to the dark skin white girls.

The Hip-Hop Nation not only is one of the few places where these issues are addressed in the mature and multi-layered manner that they deserve, but it also is one of the few places

that allows individuals to shed these labels of modernity that just don't match up like they once did. In this way, the Hip-Hop Nation offers alternative models for other states where racial strife curbs national unity. However, it is not just white power elites who benefit from old state models. There are black elites in America who are reluctant to usher away the old guard as well.

#### **4.7 - Refugees: Who You Calling A Wench?**

*"The man has programmed me, brother  
I been conditioned brother  
Even my conditioning has been conditioned."  
-Black Starr, Brown Skin Lady-*

Like any nation, the Hip-Hop Nation has its biases and its definition of what is considered normal. In the United States, in spite of blacks' predominance in popular culture, normal is generally defined by whiteness. In the Hip-Hop Nation not only is black the standard racially, but normalcy is even more explicitly defined by overt masculinity, making being a woman in hip-hop very tough. Carlita, who perhaps has a wider lens of this due to her academic background in the social sciences in college, expresses this as being due more to the fact that black men haven't had any forums where they can express their masculinity in unadulterated terms. Most of black men's survival in America throughout the balance of American history has required a certain level of submissiveness in mainstream white society. In the Hip-Hop Nation, aggressiveness is a requirement along with an unapologetic lived experience of black male masculinity. The Hip-Hop nation is one of the few places where black men have felt historically that they could completely be themselves without apology. Unfortunately, however, the victims of this masculinity have not always been America's oppressive institutions, but increasingly black women. Despite this, many black women in the Hip-Hop Nation, while not

excusing this behavior by any stretch, displayed a remarkable level of tolerance and understanding for these behaviors. Carlita not only attributes these expressions transmitted through the Rap Industrial Complex to black men's historical isolation, but also says that black women have not had as much of a requirement for autonomous forums because they have historically had more access to American institutions. Carlita says, in a point that is certainly up for debate,

A lot of black men aren't nurtured and encouraged in their families in the greater society. Women have that, whether it's education or whatever. Black women have been encouraged, "pursue your dreams, get your education, have the life that you want." Some people argue that this isn't the case. It's been really great that hip-hop has been a very black dominated space. They do need more black women. But it's great to have a space where black males come together and find their way into manhood and coming into that is important because they don't get that in the broader society, the way that women often do. Black men -we expect- have to find their way with the lack of male fathers in homes. Hip-hop has provided a way for boys to become men in ways that have not been traditional in our society. I look at someone like Wu Tang Clan. Their vocabulary is phenomenal as someone who likes vocabulary. I don't know if these guys were always like that, but at least they were able to come together for something positive. You always need to see yourself reflected in something else around you. For affirmation which we all need to grow and mature. A lot of black men might have been lost without it whereas women still get that in their families. Black men not so much.

Carlita's comments are not intended to excuse this sexist and lewd behavior that is insulting both to many of the women and men that I spoke to, she just argues (as do I) that these sexist views towards women were originated long before hip-hop. Despite this fact, many women that I spoke to seemed much more comfortable within the borders of the Hip-Hop Nation even while mainstream America points a disapproving finger at hip-hop for its sexism. Research participants like Bobbi made efforts to participate in the live production of hip-hop as often as possible despite the gender imbalance that usually stood at an average of seven boys for every girl in my field research observations. Also, many of the women in my study either defined themselves as feminists or were put off by some of the sexism within hip-hop, but their issues are not those usually referenced by outsiders who point to surface-level exploitation seen in the oversexualization of women in video and the generic use of terms like bitches and hoes. Erica is like many women I

spoke to in that she is quick to point out that the one-dimensional portrayals of women is not a problem that is unique to the Hip-Hop Nation. “The woman in general has been oversexualized,” Erica says. “It’s been like that not just in black culture, but in American culture in general where the woman hasn’t been appreciated. This overt sexualization of the woman. The violence against the woman.” Most of my respondents indicated that they believe that it is not in the interest of the Rap Industrial Complex to promote images of black love and family in particular. In the Hip-Hop Nation, many of the men I spoke with showed affection for their women by referring to them as queens or earths (mothers of the earth) as opposed to the bitches and hoes they are exclusively labeled as in the Rap Industrial Complex. While the Hip-Hop Nation too needs to take giant steps in cleaning up the rhetoric towards women as well, most of the female Fugees that I spoke with did not feel impacted by the politics of bitches and hoes in their everyday experiences. Moreover, many contend that keeping black male-female relations centered on these points obscures much of the complexity in hip-hop’s treatment of women.

Many female Fugees saw these issues as private matters to be dealt with among hip-hop headz. They were particularly sensitive to attacks by decent and acceptable black America that tried to put a leash on its cultural black sheep, hip-hop. One of the ways that the Hip-Hop Nation has fought some of its most visible battles with the Civil Rights generation is in the politics of niggas, bitches and hoes. Or at least the use of the words. There was heavy resistance to self-censorship in the Hip-Hop Nation as they viewed those who attempted to censor even some of its most offensive language, such as Oprah Winfrey, as bourgeois and behind the times. Additionally, the women in my study suggested a much stronger bond with men inside of hip-hop than they did women who

were outside of the Hip-Hop Nation. These women also did not imagine themselves as part of the same community with the video vixen, or wench as I refer to them later. (chapter 5) Like the Black Headz who separate themselves from many rank-and-file blacks who they feel promote negative stereotypes, the female Fugee was quick to dismiss any notion that the mainstream images of black women bore any connection to them. The women of the Hip-Hop Nation felt little association with how black women are presented in the Rap Industrial Complex. Says Bobbi on the matter, “A lot of people say it’s degrading cause they got scantily clad women shaking they ass in the video. But it doesn’t make me feel like less than a woman cause some other bitch in the video is shaking her ass. Women in the video aren’t being forced to do it. It’s their choice.”

It is not simply their choice, however. Black women are afforded few choices under neoliberalism and unlike their black brothers, are not as frequently able to “escape” poverty through the drug trade or some other illicit activity. Nor is athletics an option, so (like black men) more women of all backgrounds have turned to whatever limited options neoliberalism has to offer. This is true for both the well-compensated video vixen, and the commercially exploited Filipino factory worker. While many of these women try and separate themselves from these processes in neoliberal media, the reality is that these images impact them too. But Bobbi’s instincts are correct in that the neoliberal market economy is increasingly positioning communities into many different camps. Carlita, a Bachelors graduate in social science of a Midwestern university, is particularly philosophical about this process. She says of the attempt by some in the Hip-Hop Nation to separate the queens from the bitches:

The conundrum is kinda how Chris Rock said, “they not talking about me in that song.” You say that, and you accept that, but really it’s sort of what you’re experiencing with this divergence of black folks. There was this time where we were thought of as a collective, but now maybe it’s black folks vs. niggers and

ladies vs. hoes. Am I making myself more divergent from what I should be standing for as a woman? You battle that conundrum, is it ok to separate yourself from negative representations of the culture by saying they don't represent me individually? Or should you be more active in trying to make that shift for all women?

Carlita leaves the question unanswered, but I came away concluding that all seven of the women I spoke to on this subject did, in fact, view themselves as removed from how black women are depicted in popular culture. I also was surprised to find in my research many women who actually, much in the way that black men make claims to use the word nigga, were able to wield power through their use of the word bitch. For the foreigner to the Hip-Hop Nation, bitch is almost exclusively a derogatory term for women, but I found across the board in my participants' experiences, and lyrical analysis, that the term bitch is an equal opportunity slur, referenced just as easily to refer to a man. Though even here, there is some latent western, sexist notions that being identified as having feminine characteristics is a bad thing. Carlita in our interview frequently referred to men as bitch in a way that showed that this was common. In fact she didn't once refer to women in this way during the five hours that I spent with her. When I asked her about the use and meaning of this term in regard to men, Carlita equated fully-cultivated masculinity with just how hip-hop a male was, replying:

A bitch is like the worst thing you could call a black man. Like don't get me started on the fucking Dip Set. I think they are the gayest, most bitch of all the hip-hop dudes. You're the worst. You look dirty. You wear these pink bandanas around your head and they're just very, very, very immature. Like Camron, for you to get on fucking CNN and do this bullshit interview about not snitching. To not even accept the interview request would be the hip-hop thing to do. Like "white people, mass media, frame this debate the way you want to frame it, but I'm not gone take the time to explain this to you." Camron is bitch to do this interview and put forth this idea that black people are wanton crime mongers. You don't see yourself in the broader context of the hip-hop culture. You're the worst, you're a bitch. The worst thing you can call a black man in any circumstance. That's denying you any masculinity in that circumstance. You are a bitch.

Carlita's frame falls more in line with how bitch has been understood by the Hip-Hop Nation. While the term is still clearly problematic and has sexist undertones, the varying uses between the Hip-Hop Nation and how bitch is used for commercial profit in

the Rap Industrial Complex are demonstratively different. Working from Carlita's understanding of the term, a bitch is someone of any gender who does not stand strong in their principles and are ready to whore themselves out for perceived advancement. The Hip-Hop Nation is more complex in its views on gender compared to America-at-large, but there is still much room for improvement. And while hip-hop culture's most visible medium, rap music, is given far too much culpability for things out of its control, it would be naïve to believe that some of these images have no real-world impact. Hilda says that some of her experiences suggest that the music being played helps to create the environment for women where disrespect and lowered expectations are more normalized in settings that cater more heavily to the Rap Industrial Complex. In contrasting the two atmospheres created by the Rap Industrial Complex and the Hip-Hop Nation, Hilda recalls of a night out in Vegas: "You have to be careful how you dance at a certain club and what you're trying to communicate because people have some crazy perceptions. We were at one place and they were playing Pit Bull, Lil Jon and 50 Cent and all that type of stuff. And I'm just standing there having a drink and this Indian guy from India –cause he had a accent- This Indian guy comes up to me and says "shake it like one of the black girls in the video." I thought I heard him wrong so I said "what the fuck did you just say to me exactly?" Later we went to another all hip-hop club in Caesar's Palace where they was playing Little Brother and stuff and I thought something was wrong cause none of the guys was coming at me."

While the Hip-Hop Nation has progressive ideals about many matters, they are still underdeveloped in terms of the way men and women relate to one another. Often women experience an extreme of being insulted and demeaned, or being ignored

altogether. Carlita likens public representations of women and men to a junior high school mixer, saying, “Hip-hop is retarded, slow and behind traditional maturation models. You really do have that boys will be boys, and girls will be with girls. It’s junior high. Hip-hop is junior high when it comes to male-female interactions and it stays that way. You’re kind of intrigued by the opposite sex but everyone gets their moniker or their ideal of what’s what.” One way that we see the immaturity of this relationship is how increasingly black male-female relationships are framed as one of one-upmanship in the mode of competitive market capitalism, rather than a communal relationship. This is not exclusively the product of the Rap Industrial Complex, but clearly it is problematic that many black youth have only seen images of black men and women manipulating one another for economic and sexual resources. Carlita says that the way that women –black women in particular-are often viewed in America has given an expectation that all relationships are based upon capital. In a system where holding the most fists of gold wins, many have internalized and live-out these neoliberalized expectations. In making connections to the past, many of my participants see a dramatic shift in how black love has been presented in the face of even greater state actions that were designed to see the black family fail. Carlita believes that these images impact the way her identity as a black woman has been defined, saying, “the idea that the way to appeal to a woman is in your bank account is very much influenced by rap music. Back in my younger days when I would go to the club, guys would come up to you and the first thing they say to you is “I make \$50,000 and I drive a truck.” You’re telling me this because why? I think that a lot of people in the hip-hop generation don’t see the value in a woman. Like if you were listening to Motown coming up it was “I need a woman by my side”, “I’m nothing

without my baby” and you don’t have that anymore. That does affect the way we in the hip-hop generation relate to each other.”

My female participants did indicate, however, that when they went beyond the frames provided by neoliberalism, particularly as it relates to passive consumerism of the Rap Industrial Complex that profits by devaluing women, they have reformulated their self-image within a Hip-Hop Nation that gives them greater opportunity for developing a self that is not merely defined by the appendixes to men that they have served as historically in the United States for all its bogus claims of equality. One of the key differences that Erica suggested was that when she became a more active participant in hip-hop, the Rap Industrial Complex-produced images in the mainstream had less of an impact on how she viewed herself as a black woman. Erica said she evolved out of a period where she was more of a self-acknowledged passive consumer of rap music. Once she embraced more of the cultural aspects that went beyond objectified capital she experienced a change in her view of self that she credits the Hip-Hop Nation giving her the strength to discover. “I used to call myself a bitch and I used to think it’s ok, but it’s not.” Erica says of the period in her late teens, around 1994. “I believe it came from the images I was seeing on TV and media. “You a bitch. Hey bitch,” in the music, in the movies. Back then that term was ok. I remember at times feeling like it was a term of endearment. My friends who use it now, I don’t judge them for that cause I at one time used it, but I know that’s not where I’m at. I had a few boyfriends that I can say that I let call me that. And I thought it was ok. Like “I love you, you my bitch.” All like that. “You love me bitch?” I’d be like “Yeah” and get excited about it. “He called me his bitch.”

Like my mother say that's when I was in my young, dumb and full of cum days. Not necessarily in that order.”

Erica credits this change to the settings in which she surrounded herself and the imagery she was exposed to. The Hip-Hop Nation allowed her to better deconstruct the imagery of black women in popular culture in a way that is not afforded in mainstream mediums.

The public gatherings of the Hip-Hop Nation that I observed in my fieldwork were not destinations to try and meet dates. While to be sure there were no shortage of sexy women, the women that I observed and spoke with felt comfortable at places like Subterranean, the Elbow Room and hip-hop clubs in Vegas to be able to enjoy the music without being viewed as sex objects. This is far different than the public representation of hip-hop offered in the Rap Industrial Complex. And while the Hip-Hop Nation has a ways to go before it becomes Venus, women and men seem to exist as more equitable partners than they do in America-at-large even in spite of Hillary Clinton's well publicized “18 million cracks in the glass ceiling.” So while more reaffirmation of black women in particular is needed within hip-hop, one of the aspects that the Fugees said attracted them to migrate to the Hip-Hop Nation is that it was one of the few places where they felt they could fully be themselves and not have to cater to social expectations as much as Americanized women are throughout the world, who are forced to conform to a certain look, waist and chest size. I found that in the Hip-Hop Nation, women are no longer confined to high heels, lip gloss, leg waxing and overpriced hairdos. Hip-hop is all about come as you are, and the women are encouraged to do just that. And while many participants did still place a premium on their outward appearance, most of the women I

spoke to were much more interested in using clothing to make a political statement rather than a fashion one as we saw with Felicia in the section on the Black Headz. The Hip-Hop Nation, as represented in my research, also revealed very different treatments of gender than what is usually given credit in the mainstream regarding hip-hop culture. While much is made about the misogyny in hip-hop, the women featured in my research focused on the ways in which hip-hop has actually empowered them by not placing upon them the traditional expectations and demands of gender as they are presented in mainstream society. One aspect of this involves the dress code where women within hip-hop can be made to feel beautiful without wearing clothing that will overexpose their figure. And in a subculture that places high value on knowledge and information, my female respondents have had their intelligence positively reinforced, rather than viewed as a threat as many indicated was the case in the rest of America.

It has long been said that there is no society where women are treated and respected as fully equal, and sadly the Hip-Hop Nation is no different. There is a noticeable dearth of female voices in the Hip-Hop Nation. Additionally, as the Rap Industrial Complex has expanded economic opportunity for many –predominantly by exploiting female sexuality- there actually seems to be fewer women today profiting from the hip-hop economy. In speaking of her observations of musical representation by women, Aramis says, “unfortunately even though there are a lot of female artists, they not as widely recognized and known like the male artists or the male groups. Or if there is a group, there will be like one known female in a group of ten guys.” And even when women say they do feel more at ease in the Hip-Hop Nation than they are in America at-large, they continue to feel the need to validate their presence in a way that a man with a

baggy t-shirt and a baseball cap would not. The women that I spoke to in my study feel that they have to go out of their way more than black men to show that they belong in these spaces, and that they're serious about the music rather than just passive consumers of the Rap Industrial Complex.

Men within the Hip-Hop Nation must do a better job of making people like Carlita feel more comfortable. Additionally, those women already immersed in the Hip-Hop Nation must serve as role models for women coming of age presently in hip-hop much like Carlita said that hip-hop writers Danyel Smith and Dream Hampton were to her as an adolescent.

Clearly there were instances of overlapping identities in my fieldwork, or split hip-hop personalities if you will, but my categories reflect the aspect of my informants' hip-hop identity that came across most in my research interviews and participant observations. Geovanny for example, highly stressed his persona as a Professional Head with his role as a budding Chicago MC. But most of his commentary in his interview focused more on his position as an outside-insider so he was placed into the category of Fugee. My classification emphasizes which identity I felt was most dominant, but like all personalities, this choice should not suggest that the Hip-Hop Nation is one-dimensional.

“Cash Rules Everything Around Me” contrasts the Rap Industrial Complex to the Hip-Hop Nation, but also lets readers see the challenges to the public identities of the Hip-Hop Nation. This dissertation addresses the limitations and advantages of these personal battles in creating an alternative model and value system to neoliberalism. The most significant challenge may be the manner in which the Rap Industrial Complex is

working to shape the collective identities of both black people more generally, and those of hip-hop headz more specifically.

## CHAPTER 5 – PEARLY WHITES: MINSTREL RAP AND THE CONNECTION TO NEOLIBERALISM

### 5.1 - The Dandy Zip Coon

Readers will recall from chapter one that my participants often compared the image of black folks featured in the Rap Industrial Complex as a modern day minstrel show, borrowing from Little Brother's comparison on their 2005 album, *The Minstrel Show*. In an original study I conducted of BET's "Rap City," I found that there were many historical parallels between the minstrel show of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that which is ongoing through the Rap Industrial Complex. Recall from chapter three that the prototypical minstrel characters included the *Jump Jim Crow* who was always dancing, smiling and singing. The *Tambo* was distinguished by his rudimentary vocabulary. The *Wench* was an oversexed, promiscuous, exotic black woman, frequently with light-skinned, mulatto features. And the *Dandy* or *Zip Coon* was noted for trying to imitate the white upper class.

The *Dandy Zip Coon* originated in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as a subject of ridicule and mockery for white audiences who made minstrel performances of the era one of the more popular forms of American entertainment as rap is today. Once the laughter stopped, however, the Dandy Zip Coon played an important role in reinforcing racial stereotypes that helped sustain white supremacy. And minstrel exaggerations play a similar role in degrading the black collective today in a manner that also has the caveat of reinforcing the popular socio-political doctrine of the past 30 years, neoliberalism.

Rapper Lil Scrappy's ode to neoliberalism, "Money in the Bank," is perhaps the epitome of the Zip Coon edict prevalent in modern rap music, and was arguably the most blatant representation of Dandyism found in my three-month study of BET's "Rap City."

The Dandy Zip Coon was a source of mockery in 19<sup>th</sup> century minstrel performance with his heightened emphasis on careless consumerism. This buffoonish portrayal had strong political implications that mobilized antipathy against blacks in the ante-bellum period, and I contend that rappers such as Lil Scrappy are exploited to similar effect in today's political context. "Money in the Bank" was shown 11 times in my study, easily the most of any video. "Money in the Bank" features an all-too-familiar scene of a room full of people partying and drinking. Expensive sports cars are at the party scene, and women dirty-dance around them, a common theme in the visual imagery of what I label as minstrel rap. Viewers are given the impression through the lyrics of the song that this is a regular occurrence, and nothing special is being celebrated. Women are present at the gathering, but as is common on "Rap City," they are relegated to the role of Wench, serving the exclusive function of sex objects. The Wenches are usually sitting in the laps of the men in the video. Their considerable cleavage is the centerpiece of the frames that they appear in. Most of the 8 to 10 women who appear in "Money in the Bank" are dressed in shorts or skirts that end just above their upper thigh, and high heels. Those women who are not wearing halter tops, are wearing bikini tops while the men around them jump around in baggy t-shirts and blue jeans. In one scene that has little relevance to the overall theme of having money in the bank, two women exit a convenient store wearing full bikinis, as they roller skate out of the store, licking ice cream cones. The women in "Money in the Bank" are shown sporadically, sometimes in frames that only featured them from the waist down as they played the background role to the men at the center of the video who throw money (as opposed to their hands) in the air like they just

don't care. Some of the characters in the video have so much money that they use it to fan themselves.

But while the Wenchies are bountiful at this party, it is the Dandy Zip Coon who is the party's life. Ever the obedient consumer, scholars on neoliberalism such as Kenichi Ohmae (1991) had people like Lil Scrappy and his partner in this duet, Young Buck, in mind when saying that the consumers will create wealth. Unlike the subculture that Smitherman and Boyd describe, the wealth being created doesn't seem to be pouring back into the communities that created hip-hop given the present-day conditions of black people in America. In the meantime, it is encouraging to note that like Lil Scrappy, Young Buck too has money in the bank. And like the Dandy of 19<sup>th</sup> century minstrel performances, he is quick to announce his expenses to all. The modern Zip Coon Dandy that neoliberalism has created is not content simply with having money in the bank, but must also have success measured by his ability to conspicuously consume. Young Buck's America resembles a far different one than the early pioneers of hip-hop music documented. His is a land of opportunity where hard work and thrift will allow for access to wealth without any change in social structure. Young Buck begins "Money in the Bank's" second verse:

Two step with me, let me show you how it goes  
 The Murciélago, lemme show you how it rolls  
 I got a Bentley that I only drove one time  
 50 bought it for me shorty but it's still mine  
 My Chevy clean and the paint look like lemon-lime  
 You wanna shine, it ain't hard, just get on your grind  
 We keep a bankroll, wallet full of credit cards  
 Cup full of Cristal, box full of cigars  
 Dirty South tatted on my back, I'm country  
 She said she like the way I talk, these hoes love me  
 Club goin crazy, we throwin out stacks

For most of the video it is unclear exactly where all this money is coming from. Small bills enter a hole in the wall and fall into a box that is already overflowing with

cash, but viewers are uncertain what transactions are occurring on the other side of the wall. For a moment we think that maybe there is more to Lil Scrappy and he is not merely portraying a shallow Zip Coon bragging about his money, jewelry and cars, but perhaps there is a bit of the Jasper Jack in him that was not unfamiliar to old school hip-hop artists like Ice-T and Slick Rick who presented an image of success by any means necessary in spite of “the man’s” efforts to keep them down. The Jasper Jack was a minstrel character that was rarely seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as he used whites’ stereotypical expectations of him to outsmart them. In this way, the Jasper Jack would challenge white supremacy even though on the surface it might appear that he would acquiesce to it.

But no similar themes are forthcoming in “Money in the Bank.” Here, we find that the source of this money is an electronic lottery machine placed in a convenient store that is rigged for all the poor, black consumers to lose their money to the pleasure of a smiling Lil Scrappy who leaves his neoliberalism festival for a moment to personally collect the money that he has gathered. He walks out of the convenient store, pleased with himself that he has gotten over on the poor suckers who gamble away their meager earnings.

Lil Scrappy is far from alone in adopting the Zip Coon model to promote a message of conspicuous consumption. In Lloyd Banks’ “Hands Up,” shown four times, he uses the cliché’ club scene, this time with the actual club. Along the way Banks is gracious enough to allow viewers to see how he and about 20 of his closest friends arrived in luxurious sports cars. Half-naked women again dance in the background, against the cars and against the rappers, while they rap on, oblivious to the Wench who serves as a stage prop. There are perhaps 60 women featured in this video, only ten of

which are featured in close proximity to the rapper and his entourage of eight people. Bras seem to be prohibited from the party as no woman is wearing one, and well over 90 percent of the women in the video have some cleavage exposed. Most of the women, as was true in Lil Scrappy's video, are wearing skirts and shorts that end just above their upper-thigh. Some again are in bathing suits and high heels. In this video, however, four women do some actual choreography behind Lloyd Banks as he rhymes.

Once inside the club, the Wenches predominate as they couldn't find a way to get the cars into the club. Girls dance inside of cages, while Lloyd Banks and his G-Unit crew are surrounded by dozens more. Upon more careful review, it seems that the G-Unit crew are the only males in the overflowing crowd. The rest of the club contains Wenches.

Jim Jones' "We Fly High" was shown six times. The video begins with Jim Jones and his crew dressed in black suits; Reservoir Dog-style, running out of a bank with large black bags containing so much cash that some is popping out of the top. In the next scene the bandits rush to their private plane where they fly to the next destination. In another common theme in minstrel rap, a buffet of exotic sports cars awaits them. The Diplomats (or Dip Set), as Jim Jones and his posse are known, then get in the cars and drive to the mansion where a party is going on. Throngs of beautiful women in thongs await them, dancing suggestively by the pool. Just as in the other Zip Coon videos, it is the crew of three and seemingly hundreds of women. While Jim Jones and his crew are fully clothed—now without the black suits— all the women are in bathing suits and high heels. Fresh off of their heist, and no doubt countless other capers, Jim Jones and his set seem to also have "money in the bank" as they throw their money around at the camera like the other Zip Coon archetype, Lil Scrappy. In case we forget that they have money, Jones and the

Diplomats flash piles of money in the camera throughout, and fan themselves with it when the pool is insufficient. Through this first scene, Jim Jones plays the ideal caricature for neoliberal's enterprise culture, rapping:

Ya boy gettin paper (Money), I buy big cars (Foreign)  
 I need fly rides to drive in my garage (Choose 1)  
 Stay sky high (Twisted), Fly wit the stars (Twinkle ,Twinkle)  
 T 4 ? Flights , 80 grand large (BALLIN!)  
 So we lean with it, pop with it (Bankhead)  
 'Vertible jones, mean with the top listen (Flossin)  
 I'm stayin clean with the bottom ?(Do It)  
 I Hop'd out saggy jeans and my rock glistenin(BALLIN!)  
 But I spent bout 8 grand  
 Mami on stage doin the rain dance (I think she like me)  
 She let it hit the floor, made it pop (What Else !?)  
 Got my pedal to the floor screamin fuck the cops(Do It!)

We fly high, No Lie ,You know this (BALLIN!)  
 Foreign rides, outside, its like showbiz

Another prominent Zip Coon video, Birdman and Lil Wayne's "Stuntin Like My Daddy" wastes little time in promoting neoliberal excess. The first thing we see in this video is a money counter tallying thousands of dollars. The Birdman; so named because he stays fly in the latest named-brand fashions, counts another stack the old fashioned way by hand. While the Birdman and Lil Wayne are adorned with baggy jeans, white t's and baseball caps, the two women who are helping them count these boxes of money are dressed in bathing suits for some reason though there is no beach in sight. Lil Wayne smokes a cigar in his video, a common prop in minstrel rap videos, as it exemplifies the wealthy image that they aim to project.

All of these videos not only can be easily integrated with the Dandy Zip Coon model of minstrel past who is always bragging on his material possessions with hopes that this will gain him more acceptance by mainstream America; but in regards to modern socio-political debates, the minstrel rappers promote a perception that neoliberal Reagonomics have been successful in addressing concerns from the Civil Rights era.

Early hip-hop made efforts to contest the values associated with consumer capitalism, but those kind of alternative messages are not seen at all on “Rap City.” Hip-hop music has been essential in informing the public about matters that are neglected by mainstream media institutions. A glance at “Rap City” would certainly seem to suggest to viewers that the myriad of problems in the black community have all been corrected and there is no longer a need to address them. Why should taxpayers fund education and welfare, or support affirmative action when opportunity exists in America for even the most historically marginalized groups to have “money in the bank?” For Americans of all backgrounds fanning themselves with money is not the reality, so it may be difficult to empathize with those individuals who do.

## **5.2 - The Wench**

Much like the Dandy Zip Coon, the Wench featured in 19<sup>th</sup> century minstrel performances played a vital role in defining black womanhood for the larger populace. The sexuality of black women, presented through the stereotype of exotic promiscuousness, has held significant policy implications in America for well over two centuries. As Reagan demonstrated with his characterization of the welfare queen, the crisis that has defined black existence in the United States has frequently been explained away by attacking the sexuality of black women. The fundamental message promoted through Reagan’s neoliberalism was that women who could not exercise proper sexual discipline and modesty were not worthy of any social protections. The Wench furthered these stereotypes of black women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues to do so today through rap music. While the Wench was featured in 79 percent (117) of the 146 videos I analyzed on “Rap City,” there were only ten percent (15) where the Wench was the “star”

of the video. Usually the wench was resigned to a supporting role, or a stage prop akin to the bottles of champagne, fake dollar bills and automobiles featured in “We Stay Fly.”

Ludacris’ “Moneymaker” was one of the more notable displays of the Wench, but far from the only one that I found in my 20 episode study. In the spirit of neoliberalism, most artists such as Young Dro were efficient enough to merge multiple ideas and incorporated both the Wench and Zip Coon into their video.

In “Moneymaker” there are women shaking their rear ends; or “money makers” if you prefer, throughout the video. When they are not dancing like strippers for a disinterested Ludacris, they are dirty-dancing with cars. The song’s producer Pharell, who makes celebrity cameos in several other videos in my sample, is featured in the video. Though the Wench plays the leading role, the duo ensures that messages endorsing neoliberalist greed do not go neglected. In several shots, Pharell is laying fully clothed in a pile of money while the two Wenches that lie with him on each arm are dressed in a red cat suit and the requisite shorts that end just above the thigh. In one bizarre shot in “Moneymaker,” a sweat-glistening woman in a pink bathing suit danced with a 6-foot python wrapped around her body. There would be less of a problem with some of these images if they actually had some context, but perhaps I have not traveled to the artistic depths to understand the presence of the snake. Perhaps there’s a hidden Garden of Eden theme.

Nonetheless, these images demonstrate –much like the 19<sup>th</sup> century Wench- that there is little to value in black women beyond their role as sexual objects. To be sure, this process goes far beyond the realm of rap music, and is certainly not new to minstrel rap. There are even old photo spreads of hip-hop pioneer Melly Mel leaning on a Rolls Royce

surrounded by beautiful women. (Szwed 1999) So to be sure Ludacris didn't start the fire. I don't document this to slander him personally, but rather to document how few messages there are to challenge those of the Wench on programs like "Rap City" that contend to represent hip-hop culture.

The Hip-Hop Nation, and more specifically the black community, has long had issues with sexism. But there also were many artists who made efforts to celebrate, and even deify womanhood as KRS-1 has in his work. (KRS-1, 1995) Challenging "isms" has always been a primary goal of the hip-hop community: sexism, racism, capitalism, neoliberalism, fascism. But today's minstrel rappers seem to have little concern for this fight, giving the impression even that the battle has been won. In "Rubberband Banks" Young Dro certainly provides little in this tradition of hip-hop. Instead, he talks about the countless rubber bands that he needs to bundle the huge stacks of money he has. To get the point across, he shows us the rubber band stacks throughout the video. In fact, both the opening and closing shot is of a stack of money. In between, all of his posse has "rubberband banks" as well, and they proudly flash their stacks for the camera.

But the Wench plays an important role in this video also. Young Dro does not have a fancy European car in his video, but rather an old-school Chevy that he accessorizes to the hilt with rims, tint and attention-grabbing colors. Girls dance in front of the car throughout while Young Dro rhymes, neatly clothed with a plaid shirt and a sweater tied around his neck giving him the appearance of being ready for the Country Club. As rap music's audience has expanded, it has become increasingly necessary to diversify the imagery, and Young Dro obliges by featuring a Latin, an Asian and black Wench. Young Dro proves himself an equal opportunity sexist as the women each have

on bathing suits and high heels while dancing in a white room that seems mysteriously absent of sand and water. The aim of minstrel images like these is to focus less on the actual content of the song, but a close look at Young Dro's lyrics illuminate much that is relevant to my argument that minstrel rappers are utilized as token spokespersons for neoliberal doctrine. The messages of hyper-conspicuous consumption; which are so vital to the lifeblood of neoliberalism as a governing philosophy, are at the core of Young Dro's message in "Rubberband Banks."

Ridin in the cutlass same color as a bumble bee  
 I had to man I brought the flip flop jag through  
 Paint the Chevy sad blue, you know my devi sad blue  
 Ride straight pass you, my choppas will outlast you  
 I promise ima smash you, 30 us sixes blast you  
 600 see through benz call it the glass coup  
 Diamonds look like Passion Fruit, Viper look like Apple Fruit  
 Ride through the hood you know the Burban look like Snaple Juice  
 Bricks from back facts, from Summa Hill Pappa 2  
 Rapper who, bitch you know Im the Best Thang Smokin  
 Hit em in the neck with the Tech, and leave ya throat smokin  
 Dro Rollin, bitch I got a million for yo million  
 We up in these hoods trappin, buildin after buildin

"Rubberband Banks" was shown nine times during my study, second only to "Money in the Bank." It should be clear that there is a long tradition in black art of the celebration of self. Frequently in blacks' history in America they have found that their black selves have been rejected, so to affirm their identity in threatening surroundings blacks have often had to sing their own praises to keep from going crazy. In times past this was a courageous act and was done in a way not to merely shallowly glorify the individual, but rather served as a celebration of their unique blackness and the inner strength that came with wearing that. This is perhaps best personified by Muhammad Ali, who though he is universally celebrated now, was once vilified for his boastfulness and arrogance. But for blacks, Ali represented then what he does now, a black man facing the white world squarely on his own terms, defined by his own principles. Chuck Klosterman

writes, “Ali was able to effectively construct a self-obsessed persona that fooled people into reconsidering a world outside of himself. This is what made him important.”

(Klosterman 2006, 2) Ali knew by forcing you to look at him, it made you look at *us*. This is the spirit that early expressions of hip-hop culture were born from. The kind of narcissism that Young Dro glamorizes is unique to rap music in its excess, not in its content. Practitioners of hip-hop culture have not shied away from being stylish in the latest fashions. The Birmingham School referred to this reinvention of mass commodities to suit unique subcultural needs as bricolage. (Hebdige 1979) Here, a vinyl record was not just a commodity for listening, but through hip-hop was reinvented as a tool for scratching to become part of the performance. Adidas shoes were made cool because we were wearing them, not because of any marketing scheme. Nobody had ever heard of Adidas or Nike Air Force Ones before hip-hop. Like Ali’s boast, the consumption in early hip-hop made a collective statement that presently seems to be absent in minstrel rap. This is a break away from hip-hop, and black cultural tradition historically in America. Mike Brake says of this process,

...consumption among black people reflected the wider aspects of American society. In a society where black people were kept out of desirable suburban residences and decent schools and their civil rights were resisted, symbols of affluence were important. Clothes, cars and other goods were deliberately and openly flaunted. Whether it was the zoot suit, the conked hair, the city clothes of the hip cat or Superfly, or the big car and expensively dressed woman, these were all signs of money, often where no visible income was present. (Brake 1985, 117)

This is the energy that was present in early hip-hop. Not all songs were in the tradition of Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power,” which explicitly challenges black youth to fight the white supremacist power structure that is psychologically insulting them in America.

Other rappers such as Special Ed, Doug E. Fresh and Run DMC recited rhymes that weren't always overtly political, but instilled pride in the black community by their comfort in their own skin. The imagery present within minstrel rap often suggests that some black artists were not altogether comfortable in their own skin, and sought instead to compensate for this through material consumption.

### **5.3 - The Real Hip-Hop is Over Here?**

It is a difficult task to distinguish between exactly what represents authentic hip-hop culture that follows in the tradition from which it was created (Toop 1991, Smitherman 1997, George 1998), and what are false commodified representations that owe their creation to neoliberal media. (Ro 1996) For my research on "Rap City", hip-hop referred to messages that challenge neoliberal concepts of materialism, individuality and the promotion of personal economic success over collective political gains. While the placement in this category could be manipulated in different ways by future scholars, most independent researchers will likely conclude; as I have here, that these videos (if they do not represent the principles scholars have identified as being present in early hip-hop culture) would be difficult to group with some of the minstrel frames I discussed above. In coding for data that promoted collective politics, some of the videos that had themes relative to this tradition of hip-hop culture included works from Lupe Fiasco, Busta Rhymes and Snoop Dogg.

Snoop's song, "Vato;" shown six times, concludes with a hypothetical gang truce between black and Latin gangs in Southern California. While I group this video with hip-hop because of its final conclusion of collectivism and shunning of violence, it is still laced with fair amounts of internal violence that hip-hop emerged to eradicate. (Ro 1996)

The video begins with some Latin gang members attempting to rob Snoop Dogg, but he opens up the trunk of his car to retrieve a gun and proceeds to chase them down and shoots them one by one. The chorus for the song imitates the sound of the gun trigger. “Blau! Run, Run!” Snoop taunts as he seeks out the enemy. The subsequent scenes show word of the foiled robbery going through the black and Latin communities, and quickly both sides begin to prepare for battle. As the video comes to its climax, blacks and browns line up by the hundreds and eye each other suspiciously. Women appear, but are not sex objects here as they are in other moments on “Rap City.” The women here represent community support for the collective struggle, and perhaps Snoop has even positioned the women in the video to get in the battle itself. This image of black women featured in “Vato” differs significantly with the passive figure of the wench usually appropriated to women in most of the rap videos I analyzed. Alas white supremacy’s plans of minority destruction are foiled as the two communities, lead by Snoop and veteran Mexican rapper; B-Real of Cypress Hill, unify and proceed to party rather than fight. Snoop goes to a penitentiary at the end of the video to visit an imprisoned Mexican O.G. (original gangster), depicted by Edward James Olmos. “It’s time,” Olmos tells Snoop through the glass that separates them. “It’s about time,” Snoop replies in regard to the truce that has been agreed upon between the two communities. The video ends with this, leaving viewers to decide what happens next. This kind of reality rap follows in the tradition of hip-hop culture as George says it was practiced by its creators. (1998) “Vato” sends a hopeful message of positivity and unity without glossing over the very real conflicts that exist in inner city America. With its gangster posturing, the video is not without its own stereotypes, but the song’s message identifies closely with the principles

of hip-hop and certainly does not promote neoliberal philosophies of individuality and conspicuous consumption.

Busta Rhymes' "In the Ghetto" is another video that used imagery of black life without the glorification and exaggeration typical of minstrel rap. Fitting the mold of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" the video included images of people rolling dice and being harassed by the police. There are shots of small apartments, and beds with five to six kids sleeping in them. The video is shot in black & white for cinematic effect. In one image there is a crack head with a bloated belly that's ready to drop a newborn baby any moment. In one shot we're in New York, the next we're in Los Angeles, and then we are in a southern, rural ghetto conveying the nationalization of the conditions Busta describes.

The video is not absent materialism. "In the Ghetto" features Busta Rhymes driving through the hood in his gaudy automobile, with his rims prominently displayed on the tires. Given the context of the video, however, it seems plausible that this had a dual message that could be taken as encouragement. In one regard Busta Rhymes could be showing how despite his personal success, he has not forgotten those that have been left behind. And he has remained so grounded that he can still go into these communities comfortably without fear of being harmed or shunned. Secondly, Busta can show the ghetto youth that one of them could make it out of these conditions, but to be sure to come back if they did. Or it could be simply another Zip Coon moment, though there are at least enough alternative images in the video to balance the Zip Coon frame, and unlike other certifiable Zip Coon Dandys, Busta does not feel the need to go into a long diatribe about his material gains since he was able to escape the ghetto. Not surprisingly with

“Rap City’s” attention to minstrel rap, the video was only shown one time during my study.

Talib Kweli, a noted hip-hop and political activist whose work was cited by several of my research informants, made a powerful statement in his video, which was shown just two times. The appropriately named “Listen” sought to illustrate the kind of transformative power present in music; power that is absent in much of minstrel rap, unless one buys into the idea that there is power in consuming.

This video aims to promote principles of hip-hop rather than those of neoliberalism. “Listen” features several people going through everyday life with their headphones on. The video suggests that, through music, individuals can not only escape their problems, but find solutions as well. One man featured in “Listen” is working at a job that he hates but escapes through the music of Talib Kweli. In another scene a young girl sits depressed at a bus stop, before a smile is brought to her face by the music coming from the headphones of a stranger. Another section of the video is particularly relative to some of the stereotypical images in hip-hop. Here, a young man is driving through town with his flashy, “pimped out,” gas-guzzling truck to ensure being seen throughout the ghetto neighborhoods he ventures through. Activities in the video give the impression that these items are afforded through drug dealing. A few seconds later, however, the young man drives to his house where he sees an eviction notice posted in his doorway. Talib Kweli cleverly shows the irony and lack of priorities at work here, as well as the contradictions of neoliberalism that encourage consumers to play now and pay later. The impressionable young man presented in “Listen” is more focused on trying to live the unrealistic lifestyle of his rap heroes, and is not able to manage the bear necessities. But

by the video's end the young man is transformed through the music. The next shot is at a convenient store with a "Help Wanted" sign in the window. On his way into the store, the young man takes off his diamond-studded chains and puts them in the case of a street musician performing outside of the store. Then in a more powerful statement on Kweli's behalf, the street musician takes off his headphones and places them on the ears of the young man. Kweli suggests that if only the young man "listens" as the chorus commands throughout the song, that he too can be transformed. The young man listens carefully and grabs the "Help Wanted" sign from the door and walks in, so determined that he is going to get this job. Through listening he has found that it is better to gain wealth through legitimate hard work, and that the aim of this work will not be material excess at the expense of true priorities like food, clothing and shelter. Unfortunately, these kinds of messages are few and far between on "Rap City" specifically and the Rap Industrial Complex in its entirety.

#### **5.4 - Data Analysis**

In the 20 episodes of "Rap City" that are the source of my data, there were just 39 different videos shown in total. There were 146 total videos aired during these 20 episodes. Of the 146 videos aired on "Rap City," 55 percent (81) prominently featured the historical minstrel character-type Zip Coon as coded in my methods section, and 79 percent (116) of all videos framed the money-hungry, oversexed Wench as a model of black femininity. Most videos featured tributes to both the Wench and the Zip Coon Dandy. The table below illustrates a clear pattern among the most visible videos on "Rap City."

| <b><u>RAPPER</u></b> | <b><u>SONG</u></b>   | <b><u>TIMES SHOWN</u></b> | <b><u>CATEGORY</u></b> | <b><u>WENCH PROMINENTLY FEATURED?</u></b> |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Lil Scrappy          | “Money in the Bank”  | 11                        | Zip Coon               | Yes                                       |
| Young Dro            | “Rubberband Banks”   | 9                         | Zip Coon               | Yes                                       |
| Fat Joe              | “Make it Rain”       | 8                         | Zip Coon               | Yes                                       |
| Lil Bootsie          | “Zoom”               | 6                         | Zip Coon               | Yes                                       |
| Young Capone         | “What it Is”         | 6                         | Zip Coon               | Yes                                       |
| Xzibit               | “Concentrate”        | 6                         | Wench                  | Yes                                       |
| Young Buck           | “I Know You Want Me” | 6                         | Zip Coon               | Yes                                       |
| Kinfolk              | “In the South”       | 6                         | Jump Jim Crow          | Yes                                       |
| Jim Jones            | “We Fly High”        | 6                         | Zip Coon               | Yes                                       |
| Snoop Dogg           | “Vato”               | 6                         | Hip Hop                | No  |

As seen on the chart above, Snoop Dogg was the only artist of the most 10 most featured artists on “Rap City” to visually promote the principles of hip-hop culture as they were described in my literature review. The ten most visible videos during my research were shown a combined total of 70 times, almost half of my entire sample of 146 videos. Of these 70 most visible videos on “Rap City,” hip-hop videos made up just nine percent. There were six videos made by five artists (The Game, Lupe Fiasco, Snoop, T.I and Talib Kweli) that fell in my category of hip-hop for the entire sample. These videos made up 18 percent (27) of the 146 total videos shown. Though as discussed previously, these videos had snapshots of their own troubling stereotypes, none of these videos presented the Zip Coon model, and only The Game’s “Let’s Ride” contained some potential frames of the Wench though the imagery was not central to the video. Most of the video involves exactly what the song’s title commands, as The Game is seen driving his cherry red, 1964 Chevy convertible through Southern California before they arrive at their final destination of a house party. As was seen in other videos, a woman sits in The

Game's lap as they trade puffs of smoke from cigars. Though most women in the video are dressed in short shorts, there are others who are in jeans, others still in hooded shirts. And when the women dance in this video, the men dance with them at what appears to be a neighborhood cookout.

Kinfolk, along with UNK and Young Star, "Jumped Jim Crow." Songs like UNK's "Walk it Out" consist largely of simplistic, instructional dance steps repeated several times. As UNK leads in the video, he raps:

Now Hit The Dance Floor  
 Now Bend Your Back Low  
 She Do It Wit No Hands  
 Now Stop Pop And Roll  
 I'm Smoking Bubba Hoe  
 Now they in trouble hoe  
 I Like The Way She Move  
 An Undercover Hoe  
 Now Everybody Leaning  
 I Make The Crowd Rock  
 Now Gone And Walk It Out

This music is not excessive in its materialism, but offers little in the way of challenging principles of neoliberalism. Though it must be noted that Kinfolk's video "In the South" was one of the few videos featured on "Rap City" to contain at least some of the political relevancy associated with hip-hop culture. In the introduction to the video, the South Carolina-based group stands outside the state capitol with a confederate flag raised atop the building in the background. Kinfolk goes on to dance and flash jewelry for the next three-and-a-half minutes, but at the video's conclusion the group returns to the state capitol where they proceed to burn a confederate flag in defiance.

## 5.5 - Findings

This discussion is far from closed, however, there is much evidence present from my study of “Rap City” to lend support to Little Brother’s characterization of modern rap music being a minstrel show. When the most publicized images featured on “Rap City” are juxtaposed in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century minstrel character-types, there seem to be too many similarities to ignore. The Dandy Zip Coon and Wench were presented too frequently, with too much uniformity to come away believing that this is merely arbitrary. Either media institutions such as “Rap City” promote minstrel rap outright, or force Pro Headz who might act otherwise to conform to what will be most lucrative.

There are five primary findings that resulted from this research. The first is that the rap music made accessible on mainstream vehicles such as “Rap City” differ significantly with what Toop (1991), Ro (1996), Smitherman (1997) and my research respondents describe as the working-class value system of hip-hop culture. This transformation from these origins, which is quite common of subcultures in Western nations that adopt neoliberalism as a governing philosophy, requires the need for a new category for this music. In using the minstrel frames made common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, my research found tremendous similarities leaving me comfortable in labeling much of this music minstrel rap. This re-categorization would not be as profound as it seems at first glance. Previous attempts have been made by those outside of the Hip-Hop Nation to distinguish “gangsta rap” from hip-hop, a move vehemently opposed by most in the hip-hop community because many of the characteristics of West Coast *reality rap* music had been present in hip-hop throughout its history. The rest of the mainstream just caught on when Dr. Dre and Snoop began getting airplay on MTV. My call for drawing a line in the

sand is not the first. Some steps have already been taken in this direction to define this distinct new genre of black music. Byron Crawford of the hip-hop publication, *XXL Magazine* has classified the types of records featured on “Rap City” as “Minstrel Rap,” saying that “record labels are rushing out to sign the most coon-like Negroes they can find.” *New York Daily News* columnist Errol Louis even goes as far as to link many of the songs that are made accessible through the vehicles of neoliberalism directly to minstrel’s deep, dark past.

Louis cites the artist Jibbs as a primary example of this process. The 15-year old St. Louis native’s 2006 debut single, “Chain Hang Low” is derived from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century song “Turkey in the Straw” written by George Washington Dixon. The melody for Dixon’s ballad would become the foundation for the notorious minstrel song, “Zip Coon.” The chorus; or hook, which is the epicenter of minstrel rap as opposed to the complex lyricism of hip-hop music, goes:

Do yo chain hang low  
 Do it wobble to the flo  
 Do it shine in the light  
 Is it platinum, Is it gold  
 Could you throw it over ya shoulda  
 If ya hot, it make ya cold  
 Do your chain hang low

This is compared to “Old Zip Coon” which evolved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the children’s song “Let Your Ears Hang Low” which sings:

Do your ears hang low  
 Do they wobble to and fro  
 Can you tie them in a knot  
 Can you tie them in a bow  
 Can you throw them o'er your shoulder  
 like a continental soldier  
 Do your ears hang low

But Louis says the parallels don’t end there, writing “Jibbs is neither the first nor the biggest star in the world of minstrel rap. 50 Cent’s album and movie “Get Rich or Die

Tryin’” carry an unmistakable echo of a hit minstrel song from 1856 called “Root Hog or Die.” a tune based on a folk saying that carries pretty much the same meaning as 50’s title. Even the lyrics barely need tweaking to sound like modern minstrel rap: I’m right from old Virginy with my pocket full of news//I’m worth twenty shillings right square in my shoes/It doesn’t make a dif of bitterness to neither you nor I/Big pig or little pig Root, hog or die” (Louis 2006) There are several reference points that suggest there may be at least a latent link with minstrel performance in the modern rap landscape. Lil Jon, arguably the king of minstrel rap, is accompanied by the group members, The East Side Boys who go by the name of Big Sam and Lil Bo (ya know Sam-Bo, sambo). Additionally, Lil Jon’s protégé Pit Bull’s lead single for his new album was entitled “Bojangles.” Maybe this is all just a strange coincidence, but through my analysis of “Rap City” I found that the minstrel connections that Little Brother suggest in *The Minstrel Show* seems to have at least some quantitative support.

Secondly, much like minstrel performance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there are important political implications for the dissemination of these images, which brings me to my final three conclusions from this study.

Working from the position of Todd Boyd’s (2003) thesis that hip-hop has replaced Civil Rights as the dominant black political voice, the dissemination of minstrel rap reflects a backlash against this new political movement that Boyd details in his work. One of the primary political messages suggested in my research is that blacks no longer need any kind of governmental assistance. This philosophy is an important tenet of neoliberalism, and limited government assistance to the poor is a well-noted condition of

the IMF and World Bank – the leading global institutions of neoliberal policy. If BET's reporting is accurate, the economic policy that helped to spur hip-hop's creation in underground America by shutting blacks out of mainstream life, had now rescued blacks. If we are to take the present-day cultural purveyors of minstrel rap seriously, blacks are living the good life and there is little reason to question neoliberal socio-economics, or much of anything about American society. The minstrel character-types I identified on "Rap City" primarily promoted western neoliberal belief, praising free-market capitalism as the key to freedom and individual happiness. Most of the messages celebrated success and gave Horatio Alger-like visions of becoming rich against great odds. And what's more, many of the videos said that those who weren't able to flaunt their "wealth" just hadn't worked hard enough. Without context and background, viewers of "Rap City" would believe there are no barriers for entry in western capitalism, and that anyone can make it whose willing to work hard for it. Hip-hop never looked for a handout, but from its inception it had an interest in reform, if not a downright overthrow of the system. But in the wonderful world of minstrel rap, all is well on the plantation.

Of the character types I identified as my models, The Zip Coon was clearly the most evident. In the period after the Civil War, many recently-freed slaves wanted to make it a point to show their equal standing with the white man by conspicuously displaying their access to wealth. Such expressions would include fancy hairstyles, stylish suits and shoes and partying like a Rockefeller; or a Rockafella depending on your mogul of choice. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century this was done in such a way as to say to white America, "you did all you could to hold me down, but I have still been able to obtain your status symbols, and can do so with more style and flare than you could imagine." On

some levels, there is power in this, but the mocking minstrel performance of these times revealed the limitations in this power because ultimately the poor black imitations only succeeded to stay a step behind, and made fools of themselves in the process of their slickness. And so it is today. White people with real money, with real power don't flaunt their wealth. This was the folly of the minstrel performance of yesteryear, and it remains so today.

Additionally, these videos attack the morality of young blacks. Early hip-hoppers were, like the Civil Rights liberators before them, difficult to discredit because they were intelligent, articulate, industrious and accountable to their communities. Many of the images on "Rap City" are not going to be ones that middle white America is going to empathize with, and this certainly has policy implications for so-called entitlement programs that address structural inequality. And the final conclusion for this work is what it says about job market conditions in the hip-hop industry. Simply put, it sends a clear message to those who may want to become professional rappers what kind of messages are most likely to help them obtain wealth. This is an especially important aspect for young black males who have limited job choices in the society at large. Much like the choice of selling crack, neoliberal minstrel rap allows market entry for those who are willing to poison their community.

It is important to understand the history and context of hip-hop's creation in order to be able to distinguish it from commodified products that are promoted under the hip-hop banner, and that I suggest should be categorized as a separate musical and cultural form altogether. These products aren't connected to hip-hop, but are rooted in the cultural philosophy of neoliberalism. While hip-hop emerged largely from a community that was

unable to mass consume, over time, the commercial aspects of hip-hop began to receive greater emphasis. This has culminated to its present state where glorified consumption is the primary message presented in mainstream venues for rap music such as “Rap City.” As Ohmae would have it, many minstrel rappers measure success through their material wealth. In this environment, rappers such as Little Brother who work against neoliberal mechanisms are rarely given a forum in which to launch challenges to these portrayals. In the 20 episodes of “Rap City” I analyzed, it seemed clear that no such forum would be made available on Black Entertainment Television.

Though I do have my own opinions about the artistic depth of some of the music I viewed in this study, I don’t conduct this analysis to discredit performers of minstrel rap. Some of the performers of minstrel rap actually have had moments where they have made music consistent with hip-hop culture. Ludacris, for example, in his follow-up to “Moneymaker,” released a beautiful hip-hop ballad entitled “Runaway Love” that speaks to young girls with abusive, alcoholic fathers. And without question; given the direction of the recording industry, there are some hip-hop artists who may ultimately fall prey to the seductive and lucrative forces of minstrel rap. So this research uses individual artists only as a reference point for a larger industrial phenomenon. I do not use this work to attack some of the rappers who may feel they have limited labor-market choices under neoliberalism. In this context, much like Bojangles and Steppin Fetchit of minstrel past, today’s minstrel performers are doing what they have to do to ensure their survival. With the benefit of history, Bojangles is viewed more as a sympathetic victim than an exploitive perpetrator. Bojangles was the symbol of an unjust, white supremacist system back then.

The exploitive perpetrator that I hope to expose here is “Rap City” and how it is an erroneous source for those in search of authentic hip-hop culture. Much of this music featured on “Rap City” and other mainstream mediums do not fit into models of hip-hop culture, though the program does at times feature some rapping. But hip-hop is not blues, jazz or rock n’ roll though it owes much to these musical traditions. So we shouldn’t accept minstrel rap as being consistent with hip-hop because they are both generally performed by artists in black face. Many musical traditions have morphed into new distinct forms. Blues laid the foundation for Jazz and Rock n’ Roll. Rock n’ Roll birthed heavy metal. Jazz launched acid jazz. Making this categorical distinction is one of the more important conclusions I took from this research and that I hope readers can as well.

The hypothesis posed here seems to be supported and minstrel rap is a significant metaphor suggested by Little Brother. Minstrel entertainers like Bojangles performed their craft only for the money and this would seem the only objective of most rappers featured on “Rap City.” We know that in the case of Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, he lived in a time where blacks had few economic opportunities available to them. Perhaps this is the sentiment of black youth today. There is certainly much reason for them to feel this way. This coupled with the immediate gratification promoted by neoliberalism, and you have a seemingly endless circle of individuals willing to emasculate themselves for the highest bidder.

Rarely were truly adult male themes of responsibility for family and accountability to the community addressed in the content of “Rap City.” Clearly this is not profitable, and under neoliberalism and minstrel rap, profit is the only end in the view of many young black males. And little black girls who may aspire to grow up to be video

Wenches. The hip-hop conspiracy theorist in me believes that this process has been carried out by grand design. Though no immediate evidence can be presented for that argument, there is significant historical support in the prostitution of blacks with Rock n Roll, Jazz and Blues. In the late 1980s and early 1990s hip-hop culture was providing young black America some real alternatives to neoliberal ideology. Once the corporations became more involved, they stifled hip-hop's collective voice in the mainstream to a virtual whisper. But this is not a catastrophic event, and Nas' claims to the contrary, hip-hop *isn't* dead just yet. It has just evolved and relocated. In looking at subcultures like hip-hop, Michael Brake reminds us that there is always reason for optimism. He writes of subculture, "Accommodation always occurs, but is never total. Graffiti art finds its way into coffee table books or exhibitions; black cultural resistance may become accommodated into the lives of radical chic. The black cultural response then is to move elsewhere to rebel, taking full advantage of inclusion in middle-class hip culture." (Brake 1985, 127) Hopefully this work will leave readers with some clues as to where hip-hop culture has relocated. An extended analysis of "Rap City" tells us that one of the first things we can do is turn off our televisions. Next we can make greater efforts to seek out shared spaces within the Hip-Hop Nation, but if you can't pay to play, this is becoming more challenging.

## CHAPTER 6 – PRIVATIZATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO HIP-HOP

### 6.1 - Chi City

Chicago revealed itself to be a particularly beneficial site in which to explore the question of how neoliberalism is impacting the way hip-hop is experienced by the Hip-Hop Nation. My informants have suggested to me ways that went even beyond my original thoughts as to why Chicago is such a dynamic laboratory for this particular kind of fieldwork. Chicago also provides a unique backdrop to postmodern discussions of race because, as my respondents noted repeatedly, there are few cities in America where you are reminded as vividly that you are black. This distinction would lend itself hypothetically to being a site for a stronger racial consciousness than some other cities. Chicago is where Richard Wright introduced America to Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* and Sam Greenlee imagined as ground zero for the revolution to overthrow the American government in *The Spook that Sat by the Door*. Another major benefit of Chicago, as many of my respondents also seemed to be aware of, is the rich and long history of black resistance in the Windy City. Chicago is home to Geoff Fort who was said to have wielded such power as an 18-year-old black nationalist that he cost the Democrats the 1968 presidential election by persuading the city's traditionally democratic black voters to stay home on election day. Chicago is where Black Panther Fred Hampton was shot in cold blood and where his son continues to organize presently. Chicago houses both the Nation of Islam of Elijah Muhammad and Rainbow-Push of Jesse Jackson. Chicago is home to Kanye West, a hip-hop head and not a civil rights activist, whose "Bush doesn't care about black people" was what spoke for the black populace after the federal neglect surrounding Hurricane Katrina. Chicago has recently attracted Reverend Al Sharpton

who has gotten involved in the debate over Chicago's push for the 2016 Olympics and what this would mean for the city's black residents. Chicago is home to Reverend Jeremiah Wright who found himself squarely in the middle of a storm of controversy, clouding the ongoing historical presidential race. Presidential candidate Barack Obama was often heard saying on the campaign trail last year that nowhere else in the world is his story even possible. But perhaps it would be more accurate to say that in no *city* in the world is his story even possible, as the unique dynamics of Chicago politically and demographically provided earnest early tests to his political ambitions. Cases can be made for Atlanta, Washington, D.C. and Oakland, but one will be hard pressed to find a city that has defined black struggle in America more than Chicago, Illinois. Even in the Civil Rights Movement, one of the sites where Martin Luther King, Jr. was forced into retreat was Chicago, the intensity of the racism he saw being like nothing he'd ever witnessed. So in this framework, Chicago marks an excellent site in which to gain some clarity on how the Hip-Hop Nation is defined and what this means for black identity. The structure of the city itself, no doubt, plays a large role in the nurturing of this racial consciousness. In describing the city's design, one informant, Derek, said "We have to be the last, maybe not the last. But one of the only major cities that's still segregated. The white folks on the North Side, the black folks on the South Side, the blacks on the West Side, and the Hispanics on the East Side." Additionally, many of my informants have had opportunities to live in other major metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Boston, New York, Miami and Detroit and frequently said that many of their experiences coming-of-age were unique to Chicago. For example, Marc said of the intensity of the Chicago experience in comparison to his time in Atlanta, "Even though it was places where you

had to be on your P's and Q's (on proper guard and alertness) in the projects, know where you was at, it was still nothing like Chicago. Chicago will prepare you to go anywhere. Everything you see, it's like "I've seen worst than this." If you done been in Robert Taylor (housing projects) ain't nothing gone get yo heart racing."

With such blatant cooption of the Hip-Hop Nation's message by the Rap Industrial Complex, unlocking the potential for hip-hop's negotiation of public spaces in Chicago (which are rapidly being reduced in the name of neoliberalism) becomes even more important. The Hip-Hop Nation wherever it has migrated has always been in a battle with the state over the right to public space. The first live performances were conducted on makeshift "stages" in New York City streets, using public electricity to keep the party going. This piracy exemplifies how the Hip-Hop Nation has always had an aim at subverting mainstream institutions, which have exploited them for so long, to work to their advantage in ways that the state never intended. These early days of hip-hop's existence in New York were characterized by turf wars with city officials over the trains which graffiti artists felt belonged to the ghettos through which they traveled, not the dictators at City Hall. Twenty-first century Chicago is no different in this regard as my participants continue to battle municipal officials over space in which the Hip-Hop Nation can publicly gather in mass. As neoliberalism expands its sphere of influence in locales throughout the world, however, finding a truly *public* space is becoming more difficult of a task. One of the more visible fronts of the war between the Hip-Hop Nation and America is regarding the negotiation of the public space of hip-hop. If Chicago is any indication, hip-hop is often at the behest of these institutions in trying to carve out public spaces for participating in hip-hop culture. Local government and private corporate

power are colluding to decrease the amount of public terrain that the Hip-Hop Nation can claim for itself.

In Chicago this has been a particularly difficult struggle. The city has been especially cautious in catering to predominantly black audiences after the 2003 tragedy at E2 nightclub where 21 people were killed from suffocation after a mass exodus in the South Loop club that was well over capacity. The city's backlash against events catered to young, black and brown individuals demonstrates how hip-hop is heavily associated with blackness in spite of the fact that most events I observed were 50 percent black at best. If the Hip-Hop Nation is to flourish and reach its full potential as an alternative model it must be able to develop more institutions that will allow this nation to gather independent of neoliberalized power structures that are hostile to hip-hop's goals. Erica says of this lack of public space for hip-hop and E2's affect on this process in Chicago, "I know you got jazz festivals and stuff like that, but why is it that we don't have the space here in the United States of America where we can just gather with thousands of people and listen to some music? I really feel that that's done for a reason. If you go down and look like post-E2, look at the smaller capacity of the places and how often we're able to gather and hear music." One of the major steps that the city of Chicago has taken since the E2 tragedy is to pass a series of ordinances that place greater limitations on the numbers that can gather together. Most notably, the "promoters ordinance;" if passed, would have required independent promoters in Chicago to apply for a license for as much as \$2,000 every two years, get fingerprinted and submit to a criminal background check. Chicago-based Alligator Record founder Bruce Iglauer said of the ordinance, "(It) will reduce the amount of music in Chicago, make events more expensive for consumers,

dampen the large and growing economic engine that is Chicago music and create a much less supportive business climate for Chicago's small music business community.”

(DeRogatis 2008) These ordinances show how racism is used to stigmatize multicultural nations like hip-hop that rarely experience any sort of disturbances like the brawl that lead to the tragedy at E2's. In my hundreds of hours of fieldwork observing public participation of hip-hop I never observed so much as an argument to say anything of a physical confrontation, and much of my fieldwork was conducted among freestyle battles where individual personal character flaws were frequently introduced into the joust. The culture was formed largely on a premise of working towards a positive, peaceful outlet for the aggression stewing in the concrete jungles of New York City. Yet, because most agents of power are unaware of this history, the Hip-Hop Nation is commonly associated with violence that has been much more typical of American mainstream culture. When senseless, misguided violence is given a heavy forum in rap music, it most frequently is promoted by the Rap Industrial Complex. In the public spaces that I had an opportunity to observe, much of the music was used to promote togetherness and unity rather than violence and conflict. And in the private spaces that I had opened up to me, when my respondents did make reference to messages and images of violence it was generally done in a self-defense mindset of doing battle with the American state. In addition to being shut out by City Hall, my participants said that many club promoters have grown nervous over catering to largely black audiences, so the niggerized culture of hip-hop often has trouble finding a venue in which it can be enjoyed. It is important to note, of course, that while E2's catered to a predominantly black audience, it was not a hip-hop club in the least. Simplified parallels between black and hip-hop are what this dissertation

is trying to move us past. “Cash Rules Everything Around Me” also attempts to reveal some of the ways that the Hip-Hop Nation has demonstrated agency. One strategy will be for hip-hop headz to work across cultures and musical genres as was seen in the mobilization that led to a temporary tabling of the promoters ordinance, although 47<sup>th</sup> Ward Alderman Eugene Schuster has recently resurrected the legislation.

Hip-hop is tolerated to the point where it can be profitable in Chicago, but the culture has not been embraced. The Hip-Hop Nation of Chicago has not been passive in this battle over public space. One of the primary sites that my participants cited in enjoying live hip-hop performances from artists such as The Roots, Mos Def, and Common was the House of Blues, located in the heart of the Loop. Chicago’s local hip-hop community organized to ensure that more local acts were given a forum to open up for the major acts booked by the House of Blues. Felicia, who participated in the protests, recalled:

We boycotted the House of Blues. Chicago Hip Hop.com. At that time I kind of felt like things were turning over. I always felt that was a new beginning of some real good things. The energy was so right, it was a good time. And *The Source* came out and covered it. We made some real noise. Going downtown and it was raining. And making sure that they understood you not gone have hip-hop concerts in Chicago and not have Chicago people perform there. You not gone be flying people from Texas or D.C. or L.A. and we got hip-hop right here. And you not gone cut them off and give them they 12 minutes. So for a while after that, we didn’t go to the HOB, not that it’s the most comfortable venue to watch a concert. That was the beginning of the movement. All of the people that came together, it was so diverse, the group of people that came together to support that movement.

Unfortunately these kinds of movements have not been sustained within the Hip-Hop Nation, and the local Chicago hip-hop community’s ability to gather publicly continues to rely on external actors that view the Hip-Hop Nation as a threat. This is particularly important for a city like Chicago where the black and brown people, who make up a large segment of the Hip-Hop Nation, have been battling the city for public space for nearly a century. As Felicia’s activism illustrates, Chicago provides a unique

backdrop for an analysis of the Hip-Hop Nation's battles over public space. The segregated nature of the city has made it develop some contrasting ethnic mixes. The politics and design of the city has placed neoliberalism directly in the path of many of my participants. Also, Chicago is one of the best cities in which the visible divide between white and black and brown America is illuminated. This negotiation over public space in the city has a profound impact on life outcomes. If the Hip-Hop Nation is to become the political entity that many of my participants hope for, they will have to do much more to either fill these gaps or bring more public attention to them. As a social worker, Ronny has worked in many of these neighborhoods and offers some sharp analysis from the front lines, saying of the majority of young black and brown people that he works with: "Them niggas ain't got no infrastructure. We not just talking about poor. You don't have no running water, you ain't got no paved roads, you ain't got shit." Increasingly many American cities fit Ronny's description and contain segments that are very much comparable to what might be expected of a Third World country. In addition to the way that the city's evolution mirrors other transnational battles for space in the urban metropolis, Chicago is also one of the more phenomenal sites within the vast Hip-Hop Nation because it has birthed some of the more creative and artistically deep artists of the era. These artists were referenced throughout my interview and have gained universal respect including Common, Lupe Fiasco, Rhymefest, Twista and mega-star (just ask him) Kanye West. Ronny likens Chicago to a modern day Harlem Renaissance of hip-hop, saying of the city, "The Chi is killing hip-hop right now, SO fucking serious. I had like 14 Boys coming to Chicago (from Boston) be like "y'all killing it right now we gotta come out here, fuck that! Y'all killing it!" Yet this artistic energy hasn't been transferred

into the kind of institutional stability that can sustain and reproduce this kind of success, a fact that has a direct impact on many of my research participants. My participants offered a variety of theories of why Chicago has not been as successful as cities like New York, New Orleans, Atlanta and even Tokyo in creating a self-sustained, independent hip-hop scene. This has been a particularly demanding challenge for Pro Headz who often times find it difficult to make a good living participating in hip-hop without conforming to some of the stereotypical frames that they feel are detrimental to hip-hop in general and black people specifically. However, the dearth of institutional capital erected by the Hip-Hop Nation presents Pro Headz with limited choices in attempting to market and sell their products. Many of my respondents who rap professionally indicated that they would have to follow in the footsteps of some of the aforementioned artists who often had to leave Chicago to maintain any measure of commercial success. Rappers like Common and Lupe Fiasco have been on record of stating that they sacrificed record sales by refusing to incorporate neoliberalized values into their music. (Common 2000, Fiasco 2007) Yet for the Hip-Hop Nation to operate to its full potential, it is important that these griots have enough resources to be able to afford to continue rapping. Alfonso, an underground MC, says that some of the problems that Chicago has had in creating an outlet for independent artists who work outside of the Rap Industrial Complex comes from outside promoters profiting off of hip-hop without redistributing the revenue to the artists. Alfonso says that it is not surprising that many underground rappers quickly become discouraged. Alfonso describes some of the troubles in maintaining a vibrant and profitable underground hip-hop scene in Chicago, saying:

You don't get paid for hip-hop in Chicago. We don't have the industry here paying these people they money, or the people getting the money ain't sharing it cause they greedy. We just rarely get paid man unless we throw our own shows. Promoters don't pay people no more. There's another whole game in hip-

hop where these cats are getting you to bring your people out, make you pay to perform in a battle, let the crowd judge knowing that these tickets like \$25. It's a whole hustle, it's genius. They got us with it once. But then when we thought about it, it's like "hold up man everybody here is performing. That is the crowd essentially, and whoever y'all got to buy tickets to come in. Y'all gone base the winner off of crowd participation again? So I'm a rapper and another rapper, he up there killing, but I can't clap for him cause I need more claps to win. A fucking mess.

Another MC, Geovanny, say that Chicago rappers just have to be more patient, industrious, and use as much free and cheap promotion as possible, saying "Of course you know you gotta go from the ground up, gotta hit the open mics, gotta start performing, gotta hit as many venues as possible. If you have a chance to perform you take it. Use the internet to get it out, the internet is gonna be the biggest thing for me." While both of these points hold some elements of truth, the theory that my fieldwork suggests is most likely is that neoliberalism has made it more difficult for the Hip-Hop Nation to carve out public space for itself and that this is not a coincidence, but a blueprint for hip hop's destruction. There are some independent outlets and technology that has helped to tip the scales as Geovanny indicated. However, this presents barriers for the working-class to enter the Hip-Hop Nation because they probably are less likely to be in a position to be patient in waiting for an economic return on their time investment, and increasingly it is becoming difficult to make money in rap music if you don't have considerable money behind you already. And as "Rap City" revealed, the major investors seem only willing to lend financial support to those artists who fit into the minstrel stereotypes which promote consumer capitalism.

Consumption is a key element in the ongoing battle for hip-hop. Perhaps the biggest threat to the Hip-Hop Nation's access to public space is in the prohibitive cost placed over culture by corporate institutions which have been emboldened by neoliberalism. The acceptance of neoliberal corporate control by the Rap Industrial

Complex is creating a barrier for some in the Hip-Hop Nation from participating in hip-hop in its most collective form, the live show. A claim of this research is that this specific material consideration in regard to live shows is one of the more significant factors that is facilitating hip-hop becoming an increasingly bourgeois project where the culture increasingly can only be enjoyed by those with money. The rising cost of public participation in hip-hop puts headz in a very precarious position. Neoliberalism forces individuals to find more personal solutions to social problems, sucking away already diminishing disposable income. Yet many hip-hop headz genuinely want to materially support those artists like Common, KRS-1 and Dead Prez who they feel have invested in the Hip-Hop Nation, and refused pennies more from the Rap Industrial Complex. Self-preservation is the first rule of survival and of neoliberalism. This fact puts a heavy strain both on the artists and fans of hip-hop music alike. If the Hip-Hop Nation allows this process to continue unchecked, they run the risk of having their public spaces taking on the same fraudulent representations as we see in mainstream American media. Increasingly, accessing the culture second-hand through mainstream media is the most cost-efficient alternative for the Hip-Hop Nation. As hip-hop headz are faced with difficult choices of how to spend their limited disposable income, we run the risk of mainstream media becoming the only viable source for headz who withdraw from collective experiences. The rising cost of hip-hop has made for some strange bedfellows, as more casual fans who have not invested in the culture are attending hip-hop shows. Carlita says that some of the rising cost of hip-hop is the result of the Hip-Hop Nation reaching across racial and class boundaries,

I tried to get tickets for Common, but that shit is too expensive. That's what happens when the white people get into your shit. It's the idea of how –and I feel bad- someone like Common is very- you know he struggled. But you love somebody when they're just yours, but you don't support them worth a damn when

they branch out. Now he's got a certain visibility and acclaim in the hip white circles. Jeremy Piven is in his motherfuckin video. Every time Jeremy Piven is doing an interview he talks about how good Common is. Then there's a part of me that feels like he's not mines anymore, he's not ours in the same way. And then these tickets that we were all dying for when they were \$30-\$40, them shit's is like \$75 now. And you have to think that part of that is because you know white people gone buy \$75 tickets. A lot of us are not going to do that. So is it on us because you have to support your artists no matter what? Or Common are you pricing yourself out of your core? But does your core really matter? There's so much that comes into play that makes things hard in terms of hip-hop artists being able to sustain themselves -black artists period- in ways that other folks don't have to worry about.

My position here is that class is probably a greater consideration than race.

However, Carlita's point does support my claim that the rising cost is not one that blacks have been as able to keep up with as their white counterparts, and this results in their being economically segregated from these spaces that could help to reaffirm their identities in ways that are found lacking in the mainstream. My respondents being priced out of participating in a culture that they helped to create, is another way that the very real demands of neoliberal capitalism's enterprise culture has made public access to hip-hop more exclusive. Hip-hop music emerged as party music that allowed those urban ghetto dwellers to have a good time who could never afford to get into the expensive disco clubs in Manhattan. Now my participants say that public enjoyment of the culture is increasingly following in the tradition of disco by making cost a barrier in a way that Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash could not have intended when they set up their speakers and turntables on New York City streets nearly three decades ago. In his observation about the present-day public access to hip-hop culture, Ryan, complained, "And right now, if people really paid attention, only certain companies are putting on these big shows. Like for Jay Z . The reason why the Lupe Fiasco show (I attended) was real important is because it was a free show. Most of the shows I been going to been free or very inexpensive. Because these big companies that they getting with are just charging

obscene amounts of money. You can't see a show at the House of Blues for cheaper than \$45. For one artist? And this artist got one album?"

But in my own experience, many of the free shows merely promote different forms of corporate exclusion rather than the inviting shared space which originally defined the Hip-Hop Nation. Recently, for example I had the pleasure of enjoying a concert by Q-Tip, formerly of A Tribe Called Quest, a group that was referenced often when participants wanted to show their cultural authenticity. Awareness of the Queens-based trio's work throughout the 1990s was so vital to Hip-Hop Fundamentalist Hank, that he questioned the hip-hop authenticity of anyone who wasn't familiar with certain Tribe lyrics. So in many ways Q-Tip represents the very antithesis of the minstrel rapper, and his concert would likely attract true believers and not the casual fan that Carlita is leery of. Yet there are many aspects about the show and the way it was promoted that go against hip-hop values of multidimensional inclusion. There were no public announcements of this show, attendees only finding out about it through a direct e-mail blast or through word of mouth. So if you weren't in certain circles within the Hip-Hop Nation already, you had very little chance of finding out about this show. And if you weren't fortunate enough to have a computer, you had no chance at all of attending. Most significantly, this process allowed a company like Bacardi that has no real investment in hip-hop beyond its commercial use, to have too much institutional power over who would be allowed in these spaces. And while the concert itself was free, Bacardi was able to compensate by closing off the bar to all drinks except Bacardi that evening. And compensate they did with drinks that started at \$10. Nonetheless, hip-hop was definitely in the building that night as Q-Tip put on a first-class show. It's just unfortunate that so

many others were excluded from seeing it. Ryan's quote does highlight the contrast between a Black Head like himself and the Zip Coon Dandy featured in "Rap City." While messages from the Rap Industrial Complex glorify materialism and the practice of overpaying for faddish luxury items, there is an explicit rejection of conspicuous consumption by the Hip-Hop Nation. Several of my informants took great pride in underpaying for the products that they consumed as opposed to trying to achieve status by overpaying, whether this came from getting deals on clothing to downloading free music off of the internet. So this principle of frugality (even for "free" shows) makes public participation in hip-hop particularly difficult in an era where neoliberalism reduces the amount of truly publicly-owned space.

These free shows also represent some ways that the public has forced some adjustments by the Rap Industrial Complex as this increasingly is the only price that's within the budget of many hip-hop headz. Reaching the public directly through the live show used to be an absolute requirement for hip-hop MC's. Mainstream media institutions largely shunned rap music for the first 20 years of its existence. So it was essential for any artist who wished to develop a large following to do so by connecting more directly to the public through live shows. In this era of served-quick-fresh-and-hot, McDonaldized rap, however, rappers can quickly develop an intimate relationship with the public through music video. This has resulted in live shows having far less polish and distinction than what was enjoyed in earlier periods of hip-hop where rappers knew that this may be their only opportunity to make an impression on the public. Industry-wide record sales show that increasingly consumers are reluctant to open their wallet for the latest CD or mixtape. Public performances are no different, particularly when the

products don't offer much in the way of variety or quality for many of the self-defined hip-hop headz that I spoke to in my work. Corey laments of this process, "Number one, it's nobody to see. I'm not gone pay more than \$500 to see Jay Z. I don't want to see Young Jeezy, I don't want to see Young Joc, Lil Bootsie. I don't want to see no Youngs and no Lil's so that's probably why I haven't been to as many shows lately."

Cost and lack of variety are not the only considerations for the Hip-Hop Nation. My respondents seemed to be deeply concerned with exactly *who* they would share their public space with. They were not into the big arena shows at 20,000 seat venues such as the United Center, Allstate Arena or UIC Pavilion but instead preferred smaller gatherings of hip-hop headz. Carlita explains this logic, which I found to be true throughout all categories of the Hip-Hop Nation:

I'm not going to a hip-hop show at the United Center. That would be wack to me. Intimacy- I think that's part of the camaraderie, some of it's the great equalizer. If you're going to a small intimate setting you don't get to be the white people who have all the money, who get to have the best seats and you don't know what the fuck is really going on. Let me think of a concert where that annoyed the shit out of me... I saw Kanye when *Late Registration* was coming out at UIC Pavilion and there were these white girls in front of us and they was just dancing. And my assumption -I could be wrong- is that they're just there cause he's the hot artist and everybody knows this little cute song. And on "Gold Digger" when he said, "leave yo ass for a white girl," I was real loud and I pointed at them. And I was a little bit aggressive, whatever. But it's my way of being like "bitch this is my world, you're just visiting." I had a good time at that show. But not how it would be at the House of Blues, at the Congress Theater because there is this idea of the great equalizer. Like yeah I see a bunch of annoying little white kids and pseudo-backpackers, but I'm gonna assume if you spent the money for a standing room only show you're serious about wanting to be there. And it's on equal footing, we're in this space together. I'm gonna have to make room for you and you're gonna have to make room for me. But know that when Ghostface is on that stage, he sees you out there, but I'm more representative of what his realities are. So that in an intimate space, you feel like everybody knows their place a little bit more than a traditional stadium kind of thing. And know your place doesn't mean that a white backpacker can't be there, but understand that if you're going to be about this culture, this is what it look like. So if you're for real, it shouldn't be uncomfortable for you and don't just be a visitor.

While the elements of class exist all around outside of the Hip-Hop Nation, Carlita and others feel it is vital that these spaces don't reproduce these class boundaries. Everyone being subjected to the same discomforts and lack of luxury is part of what helps level the playing field in the spaces within the Hip-Hop Nation. This is far different

from the Rap Industrial Complex where there is a constant emphasis on what one has and what others don't. In describing what most in the Hip-Hop Nation view as an appropriate setting for shared space, Geovanny says of a club in the Irving Park area, "The smaller venues are a lot more fun. There's a place called the Abbey Pub over on the North Side. That's a really good venue. It fits about 300 people. But if you get the right atmosphere, that place is rocking like it's 10,000 people in there." When asked why the smaller venues were superior, Geovanny said, in an illustration of how important collectivism is to the Hip-Hop Nation, that these underground spaces provided "more of a community feel. It's not like that cheesy over-done shit at the bigger venues. And at the smaller venue you know you really like that group." Corey quantifies the size of a show with how in-touch the artist is in with the common folks that make up the Hip-Hop Nation. He says of rap megastars Jay-Z and Kanye West: "They not gone have a small venue show. When I think of hip-hop, I think of the embodiment of the people, you more in tune with the people. When you have a big concert, you only see the three people in front that paid top dollar, you have no real connection with the crowd. But when it's a smaller intimate environment, those are people who are really your fans. You go to one of those (stadium) shows, it's a big extravaganza, it's not like that one-on-one connection. You don't feel that whole power of the music and what the artists put out to the people cause the only reason they there is cause they can afford it. At the smaller venues it's not as hard to find out who's who."

## 6.2 - The People Under the Stairs

The Hip-Hop Nation is the step-child of Chicago nightlife. It isn't given prime time status in the city's privately-owned nightclubs by being featured on Friday or Saturday night. The Funky Buddha Lounge held hip-hop night on Wednesday. It was Monday nights at nearby Sonotheque. At the aptly-named Subterranean, easily the most popular place to enjoy hip-hop music among my participants and in Chicago-at-large, hip-hop night was Tuesday night. It is easy to imagine party goers looking for a good time to accidentally decide on a hip-hop setting to pass the time away without being committed to the culture on any level. However, those who routinely came to clubs like Subterranean on cold Tuesday nights in February seemed to have been clearly more devoted to hip-hop culture than those who just have a temporary, casual interest in hip-hop. On just about any night of the week, Chicago club goers can usually expect to stand in an extended line and be subjected to rotating pay scales. "Free before 10" is how a lot of these parties are advertised, although most males who arrive at 9:20 pm will find that they will often be forced to stand in line under the ruse of trying to stabilize capacity, before finally being allowed inside at 10:20 where they are forced to pay \$20. Those arriving after 11 pm will pay \$25 if they're lucky. \$30 will be the fee of admission for those poor fools coming after midnight. Clearly in these settings the primary emphasis is not bringing people together for a common cause, so much as it is turning a profit.

People were not just-so-happening to stumble upon hip-hop while casually walking through Wicker Park. Those who regularly attended clubs like Subterranean actually wanted to go there specifically in search of an atmosphere that couldn't be created elsewhere. To constantly fill up a club, as Subterranean did during my nine

months of observations, when most of the attendees would overwhelmingly be heterosexual men took more of a conscious commitment to hip-hop culture than what my participants described as seeing in some of the big sports arenas that hosted rap concerts. There would be no Kanye West, Jay-Z or Beyonce sightings at Subterranean. In fact you were generally unlikely to hear any Top 40 music played at all at Subterranean. Those individuals that regularly patronized Subterranean –or Sub-t as its called by the locals- certainly were not drawn to the glamour, glitz and comfort of the night club. They were attracted to Sub-t because it gave them a space to interact as a collective Hip-Hop Nation. Anyone who spends a night inside the walls of Subterranean will find themselves exposed to something dramatically different than what they would experience just outside the doors, in neoliberal America. The identities and forms of self-expression are far more diverse than what is processed through the Rap Industrial Complex assembly-line. Each of the identities I described in my fieldwork interviews could be reaffirmed in a space like Sub-T in some very significant ways that they would have trouble finding elsewhere. And at \$5, cost is not a major barrier to sharing this collective space. However, even this space is limited as the club owners *allow* the Hip-Hop Nation to gather here on Tuesdays at their discretion. Without direct institutional control by those who have a vested interest in maintaining these spaces, hip-hop headz always run the risk of having the music stop and the party coming to a screeching halt.

Resting just off of the Blue Line's Damen el stop, Sub-t offers the kind of dark, danky, damp, secluded, intimate hip-hop setting that my participants say creates the perfect live environment for a hip-hop show. If you're not looking for Sub-t, you could easily miss it, not only because of its positioning at one of Chicago's few angled streets

that once served as Indian trails. But also there are no bright neon signs like several of the other clubs on Milwaukee, Damen and North avenues that intersect at Sub-t. The mezzanine is strictly hand operated and it's not uncommon for some letters to have fallen down, or been blown away by the hawk, where on a given night it might read : "T- - sd-- -ip Ho-" instead of "Tuesday: Hip Hop." When you walk up to Sub-t, you will usually see a few people huddled outside, banished to the club's exterior by the recently passed ban on indoor smoking. Most use this opportunity to network or kick a spontaneous freestyle rhyme that can be better heard over the music pounding inside. The polite, Caucasian, spike-haired bouncer, with more tattoo ink on his arm than bare skin, asks to see my ID before directing me to an Asian man who asks for \$5 after greeting me with a "what's up bruh." Unlike many of my experiences in entering into Chicago's nightlife, this exchange is short and unobtrusive. In a city that has seen more than it's share of nightclub shootings in recent years, extensive pat downs have become almost mandatory in entering a nightclub, or most any public building in Chicago. But at Sub-t there is no frisk, and in my first few weeks of observations I am only asked to voluntarily reveal the contents of my book bag without being required to open it. I tell them my pad and my pen are the only weapons I have inside, and my word is accepted on my own merit without having someone else look through the bag, or even being forced to open the bag for visual confirmation. The search is done to keep up appearances, and to give the club slightly more legal cover if a tragedy did ensue. But it seems clear that most occupants are expected to police themselves. After several weeks of making my face familiar at Sub-t and proving myself not to be a criminal by staying as inconspicuous as possible, the queries concerning the contents of my bag were eliminated altogether.

While prices on other nights at the Wicker Park lounge could get as high as \$20, on hip-hop night the cover is \$5 all night long. And the body language of the Asian host at the door, who promotes the weekly event, suggests that he is not fully comfortable even asking people for that much. The honor system displayed in the club's security check works throughout many levels of the party as the hosts allow people to come and go without having the prerequisite hand stamp that is generally given for people who leave a club's interior for any amount of time. Many Chicago clubs don't allow re-entries at all. After several months of observations it seemed that many of the club's patrons were regulars, which allowed for more of a relaxed environment. This type of lax atmosphere and the way that many of its inhabitants (male and female) greeted each other with deep, long bear hugs reserved for family members that had not seen one another in a while, indicated that the regulars at Sub-t were part of a cohesive hip-hop community rather than a random collection of individuals that make up most public nightlife gatherings in Chicago, and who share public space more generally in America at any time of the day. This kind of familiarity is vital for hip-hop's development and can best be cultivated in these collective, public gatherings.

One of the things that my participants discussed was that those who try to ride on the fringes of the Hip-Hop Nation should be made to do so in a less-than-comfortable environment associated with modernized sports arenas that are equipped with all the latest technological amenities. Sub-t will easily meet the Hip-Hop Nation's quality control standards, though upon walking in the door you will quickly get the sense that most people feel right at home. There are few places to sit in Subterranean, but at 10:30

pm I generally arrived early enough where I was able to grab one of the ten seats at the bar. Or I could stretch out on the set of hard, worn, leather booths that were arranged southwest of the DJ table. A set of mirrors line the wall just behind the booth, giving the look of a VIP section from a dated, 1970s disco club. However, after several visits to Sub-t, an outsider will soon discover that it is this kind of cheesiness and lack of pretentiousness that attracts many hip-hop headz into these spaces. No one is coming to the Sub-t because it is the vogue hangout for Lincoln Park yuppies who read about it in the *Red Eye*. Horny frat boys aren't drawn to the eye candy behind the bar, as Sub-t's service staff consisted of a small Mexican man with a gruff, no-nonsense manner, and a heavy-set white woman with a calm and friendly demeanor reminiscent of a favorite aunt that you could complain about your parents to. If there are top-shelf drinks at Sub-t, they must be carefully tucked away because from my normal view at the center of the bar there seem to be only the basic cognacs, gins and vodkas that could be purchased at any local convenient store. Or at a gas station if you were in a black neighborhood in Chicago. A look around Subterranean and it would seem obvious to an outsider that most would have to have come for the music and the vibe that it helped to create.

Occasionally two additional tables were set aside on some winter nights when the crowd was lighter, but generally the organizers of Subterranean hip-hop night are careful to leave plenty of room in the middle of the room, forcing people to meet in the middle physically, if not always socially and politically. Sub-t has a 350-maximum capacity that seems like plenty until most of the crowd begins to arrive an hour and 30 minutes into the party, at 11:30 pm. The Hip-Hop Nation commented throughout my interviews that they preferred small, intimate venues and Sub-T is every bit of that, measuring roughly 150

feet long and 30 feet wide, with faded, hardwood floors. Upon taking a seat at the bar, one of the first things you notice upon entering Sub-t were the three black and white framed 8 x 10 inch photos that hung on the west wall. The dark lighting in the room helped to draw the black and white images of Chicago's boys in blue in action even more to my attention, as it is one of the few things beyond ten feet that you don't have to squint to see clearly. In the first photo there is a police officer riding a teenage bicycle. The second photo, hung about 18 inches to the right, has a group of officers frisking a visibly distressed young Latino male against a police car. There are no captions for the photo, but the boy who appears to be in his mid teens seems to put up little resistance and seems resigned to his fate. In the third photo a group of black and Latino bystanders look on in frustration, apparently looking on as the young boy is taken away to jail. I am fixated by the powerful photographs before my attention is grabbed by a loud thud coming near the DJ's booth.

On most nights, local breakdance crews are usually among the first to enter the club as they want to take advantage of the open space available before the heavier crowds arrive, and Subteranean's worn, yet sturdy hardwood floors are very conducive to some of their acrobatics. The dance floor activity is initially light on a rainy night in April as two b-boys, actually one b-boy and a b-girl, metaphorically stick their toes in the water but don't go for a full fledge swim. It is evident even to a novice of the culture that the pair are not going all in, using the time more as a scrimmage than a full-out joust, though it seems clear that their mouths water for a battle. The female is initially more tentative, practicing a series of elaborate footwork combinations as opposed to the aerodynamics displayed by the male who goes through a series of headspins, backspins, and windmills

to a hushed wave of oohs and ahhs from people who are more engaged in conversation than the action on the dance floor at this early point in the evening. Whether breaking or not, as Carlita had suggested, many of the women did not visibly appear to be quite at home as their overly-assertive male counterparts. This dynamic of women made to feel as though they are hip-hop refugees is perhaps most visible when it comes to participation in the four elements in the Hip-Hop Nation.

When the Genius' "Liquid Swords" is played, the male dressed in black jump-suit pants with red lining, and a snug-fitting black and red hooded shirt gets at his most aggressive during the 30 seconds that the DJ plays the song. Clearly a crowd favorite, several people can be heard rhyming along to the song. The DJ lowers the volume for the song's chorus, allowing the gathering crowd to carry the track. "When the MC's came, to live out they name," we sing to a rising cacophony as more people slowly join in. "And to perform, some had to snort cocaine, just to act insane." As the DJ returns the volume to normal, the b-girl on the floor seems to feed off of this energy and explodes into a series of backspins before leaping into a left-handed handstand that she held steady for 10 seconds, before gracefully ending it by removing her white baseball-cap and subtly tipping it to a crowd that she senses is watching her every move, though she doesn't dare look at anyone during the entirety of her routine. The crowd awards her showmanship with a round of applause before the DJ blends into the next song, which does not capture the dancers' or the crowd's energy quite as much as the Gza. The breakers continue on, fairly uninspired, yet still impressive for a few moments. I nod my head while sipping a Guinness Stout, eyeing their moves, while simultaneously trying to maintain my hip-hop cool, indifference and lack of awe. The duo, who appear to have a mentor and mentee

relationship, seem not to be doing this for any observers at all, but rather for their own amusement. It just so happened that 50 other people were around. Other than some acknowledgement of the DJ with hand gestures, and my rebuffed attempt at an interview, the four person breaking crew don't interact with anyone else all night in my observation. They could easily have practiced such routines in a private setting, but my observations of seeing them over several weeks lead me to surmise that they needed this collective space to gauge their community's reaction to their craft. This shared experience better allows them to see how to position themselves within the Hip-Hop Nation. The pair, who eventually are joined on the floor by two other Latin males, both seem visibly disappointed that their laying out of territory did not warrant any challenges. They practice moves a little more with two of the boys trying out difficult moves while the girl watches for a few seconds before mimicking the moves herself. After seeming satisfied with their session, and seeing that no one will come and put their scrimmage to a real test, the four person crew retreat to a booth, dejected that the battle will have to wait for another day. Although in the four times that I saw them there, they not once had any takers.

The b-boys and b-girls were slightly easier to distinguish from your typical hip-hop head at Sub-t. The brekdancers' style of dress was much more identifiable with the Hip-Hop Nation though this had more of a substantial, functional purpose than the stylish one that many observers of subculture might anticipate. (Hebdige 1979, Muggleton 2000) While hip-hop is often caricatured by excessively large clothing, in the early days of the Hip-Hop Nation many of the early trendsetters in hip-hop style and fashion actually wore their clothes tighter than what would come to be expected later of many hip-hop headz.

The breakdancers wore their clothes tighter than most to make sure that their clothes stayed on while they performed and so that baggy clothing wouldn't work as an aerodynamic impediment for their spontaneous movements by land and air. But by most accounts, as my research informants indicated, it was very hard otherwise to determine any kind of hip-hop uniform. This suggests that objectified capital is losing its significance in identifying hip-hop headz. In 11 visits and over 50 hours spent at Sub-t, I saw some individuals who wore their sunglasses at night. Some would wear blue dress shirts, khaki slacks and brown pairs of loafers. Another came in wearing a brown blazer, a blue shirt with brown pinstripes with French cuffs poking out of the jacket's arms, sans cuff links. Camouflage in some form was worn by many people who patronized Subterranean, and was probably the most visible form of objectified capital that connected someone to the Hip-Hop Nation. Some wore camouflage shorts. Some wore camouflage hats. Some had the design in their hats. One woman had a camouflage skirt that ended just below her knee. Many people wore sports jackets, hats and jerseys that generally seemed to have more to do with the color scheme than any fan alliance except for the considerable amount of people that seemed to be wearing New York Met and Chicago Cub jerseys on a Tuesday in April when the two played at Wrigley Field. Several people wore white t-shirts. Most rocked their white t with a pair of jeans although one party goer wore his with a brown suede vest and a particularly tight pair of blue jeans. There was a gentleman with a tight, Under Armour spandex, form-fitting shirt. Most of my participants seemed almost to make it a point not to have any designer labels visible. This is a stark contrast to the Rap Industrial Complex that is defined by promoting consumer capitalism of high-end designer fashions. When I did observe gaudy

displays of labels from hip-hop inspired clothing companies like Enycee, Ecko or Phat Farm, it was more likely for whites to wear huge labels than blacks and Latinos at Subterranean. This speaks to the overcompensation required by most Refugees who are forced to more explicitly display their cultural affiliation. When most people, of any race, chose to wear some kind of insignia it was generally related to something cultural such as a flag of Mexico or a silhouette of the African continent on the front of a shirt. Shirts with political statements abound at Sub-T. Some wore shirts with Emit Till on the front. One young woman was spotted in a Sojourner Truth t-shirt. Che Guevara received heavy face time at Sub-t. A 20-something white man with a black baseball cap pulled down over his eyes wore a t-shirt that read simply “know more.” A Latin MC, who frequently rocked during the open mic session, went in a different direction and wore a shirt that read: “Chicago, city of Haters.” This spoke to a common theme found in my field interviews of a wide ranging perception that Chicago’s local hip hop community does not stick together like other communities do. Many of the fellas that I observed in my nine months of attending Subterranean had a wide range in dress styles. As Carlita indicated in my interview with her, the women on hand at Sub-t seemed to have to show that they belonged in these spaces by wearing clothing that would demonstrate a more explicitly visible connection to the Hip-Hop Nation. To be sure there were several women that wore more traditionally feminine garments, but usually the women in Sub-t would be spotted wearing an oversized baseball cap, a Run DMC t-shirt, something red, black & green (irregardless of whether they were black) or something with a socio-political message of some sort. In an effort to both combat the images of the wench offered by the Rap Industrial Complex and demonstrate their authenticity to the dominant males in the

culture, black female Refugees had the most constraints on their range of expression in these spaces. Clearly, a desire to represent the Hip-Hop Nation through their style of dress was true of many of the men I observed in Sub-t as well. Throughout my field observations, I examined many people walking in mass with backpacks like myself, which is often used as a common clichéd, stereotype of someone who self-identifies with hip-hop. The style became so clichéd that in many circles it was a look that had negative connotations in the Hip-Hop Nation, and is often openly mocked by the Rap Industrial Complex. The knapsack again has functional origins in the Hip-Hop Nation as many graffiti writers carried them to hold their spray-paint, and other equipment that they needed to bomb a public canvass. At Subterranean, and other sites within the Hip-Hop Nation, there is little concern over the negative connotations as not only do people actually want to be identified in this way that speaks to a romanticized, more pure time in hip-hop. But also for many who rely on public transportation to get to Sub-t, these backpacks (or knapsacks as they are referred to in the Hip-Hop nation) have a very real functional purpose of carrying along belongings needed for long pilgrimages to the North Side.

The crowds peaked at Subterranean through the summer, consistently attracting between 150-200 people. But even through an especially brutal winter they had a pretty regular turnout on Tuesday nights. This was a group that was more than capable of policing itself and didn't need the overprotective ordinances that were limiting the city's public space. Not only was there nothing close to a fist fight during my field research, but no one so much as even raised their voice at one another. In nine months of doing fieldwork at Subterranean I came away feeling that Mayor Daley might be well-served by

visiting these types of sites that show the possibility for carving out public, secure places in ways that the city has found very challenging in 2009 and many years before. At Sub-t people were ultra polite and courteous. Black head salutations of “excuse me black mans” and “my bad Gods” were commonplace as people tried to break through the crowded, cramped spaces of Sub-t to go to the bathroom or get a closer look at the open mic participants. The women were not viewed merely as sex objects and few people seemed to be overconsuming alcohol. And while the neighborhoods outside were segregated like none other in the United States, the gathering at Subterranean was as diverse as the music you heard inside.

The DJ, enclosed and elevated in the northwest corner of the club, is so obscure that you would almost forget that he is there. But you won't be in Sub-t long before you feel the presence of the Pacifics, the duo that host the event and serve as resident DJ's. The DJ conversely, is not focused on the crowd visibly, but seems to have a game plan that he executes to precision if crowd approval is any judge. Though Tuesdays were devoted to hip-hop music at Subterranean, it was not uncommon for the Pacifics to mix in soul classics from the 70s and 80s. He begins with Michael Jackson's "I Can't Help It" before blending into De La Soul's use of the melody on "Breakadawn." Billy Brooks jazz ballad, "40 Days" suddenly is transformed into A Tribe Called Quest's "Luck of Lucien" Next we hear Curtis Mayfield's "Move on Up" transformed into "Touch the Sky" by Kanye West. Bob James' keys on "Nautilus" is weaved seamlessly into "Daytona 500" by Ghostface. By incorporating the rap records with the original songs that they were sampled from, the DJ shows how important it is in the Hip-Hop Nation to maintain these links with the past. This is an aspect of hip-hop culture that the Hip-Hop Fundamentalists

I interviewed said was vital. The Pacifics routinely made this value explicit for those who gathered at Sub-T. I consistently found the DJs at Subterranean's selection to be a welcomed escape from the repetitive and formulaic cycle of the Rap Industrial Complex. In nine months I can recall very few songs played that would be considered mainstream and certainly nothing featured on BET, or Booty Every Time as one respondent put it. There would be music featured from the likes of Outkast, Jay Z and Kanye West who have been some of the few that have retained hip-hop credibility while reaching unprecedented commercial heights, but otherwise the DJ's music selection was as subterranean as the venue itself. While the MC is labeled master of ceremonies, the DJ is generally fully in control at Sub-t and most public gatherings of the Hip-Hop Nation. Like a wizard with mystical powers, the DJ physically transforms the collective mood of the crowd at Sub-t as he gets them hyped with Old Dirty Bastard's "Brooklyn Zoo." "Ya Mama" by the Pharcyde elicits a more playful mood among the party revelers. Consequence's "The Good, The Bad, The Ugly," produces more introspection as most people seem to try and follow along closely as Consequence and Kanye flip metaphors at breakneck speed. Nostalgia and energy fill just about every corner of the room when he plays Black Moon's 1993 hip-hop standard, "I Gotcha Open." Many individuals are so energized by the song that they are forced out of their seats, seemingly not able to physically constrain themselves. Others see this as an opportunity to demonstrate their hip-hop credibility by rhyiming along with every lyric. "I be dedicated to the moon cause it's black/resurrect come back/ now tell me 'bout the other side jack."

Public events within the Hip-Hop Nation are very much reliant on collective energy to maximize the experience. Though it was rare that the crowd did not meet these expectations, when they did they were quickly taken to task by the DJ. “Y’all feeling good Chicago?” the audience is asked one night in mid-June. When the reaction to the call and response or the music was not deemed sufficient The Pacifics were quick to take action. The DJ quickly turns the music off and orders the lights up. “Hold the fuck up man. Let me try this one mo’ God damn time. It’s a beautiful night, we listening to good hip-hop. How y’all FELLING Chicago!?!?!?” The crowd is much more enthusiastic in their response the second time and no longer require discipline the remainder of the evening.

On an average night the crowd would be representative of the balances within the Hip-Hop Nation at large with 15 percent Asian & Indian and about 35 percent black, 20 percent Latino, 30 percent white and 5 percent other. While initially there seemed to be some cliques among each demographic in the early part of the night, generally as it got later into the evening and people came and went, there was heavy cultural exchange. A black girl danced with a petite Japanese girl with high cheek bones as the MC’s passed the mic to Mobb Deep’s instrumental for “Quiet Storm.” The Latino b-girl wearing a white t-shirt with Mala spray painted on the front greets the 6’4, slender black man as he comes in from the cold. The Indian gentleman pulls out a chair for his white lady friend. Some wear their hair in Mohawks. Some have baldheads. Some have Afros. Many people –black, white and Asian- wore their hair in dreadlocks. Some of the relatively few black women that attended Subterranean wore their hair in wraps, while others had perms. Many women of all races wore baseball caps so you couldn’t tell how they wore their

hair or whether they had any at all. By a quarter after eleven the crowd usually had filled up considerably to where there was no longer any room left for the b-boys and b-girls to execute their moves. Though their computers give them easier access than ever before to many of the tunes being cranked out by the Pacifics, it is these shared experiences and cross-cultural connections that Tech Headz are unable to reproduce online.

In respective corners of the club around this time, there are several gladiators sharpening their weapons, overly eager for combat. Some will begin to pace their corners of the room anxiously. Others scan the room for other potential threats. Some sit back unsuspectingly, blending in with the crowd only to launch a sneak attack later. Though the open-mic freestyle battles that have brought many of these people out on these Tuesday nights are scheduled to begin at 11:30 pm, the Hip-Hop Nation has shown itself in my experience (both within and outside of the fieldwork) to have a much more flexible concept of time, so it would not be uncommon for the tournament to begin at 11:50 or even midnight.

The freestyle cipher is all at once one of the more vulnerable and democratic settings you'll experience in the Hip-Hop Nation. All of the combatants who dare throw themselves at the mercy of an often merciless public have undoubtedly honed their skills in ciphers of much less consequence hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of times before. But as Eminem so brilliantly displayed in his film *8 Mile*, it takes an entirely different level of gumption to expose yourself to a room full of strangers in such a public manner. But if their outward demeanor is any indication, most of the contestants don't seem to belie even the least bit apprehension. The freestyle contest at Sub-t is organized chaos. Often without warning, the music volume is lowered slightly and there is a short

speech announcing the battle's beginning. MC's rapidly come forward without further prodding to the space formerly occupied by the breakdancers, just in front of the DJ's booth. From there, the 15-20 MC's who rock the mic on a given night are able to govern themselves as they pass the mic without incident as the DJ seamlessly switches the track. Though there is heavy traffic to and from the bathroom through the 30-45 minutes of the open mic, no one has to be told not to walk through the freestyle circle, or cipher as my respondents call it. There is the occasional long-winded MC who has to be shouted down by the rest of the impatient MC's who want their turn on the mic, which always eventually caused the greedy MC to relent without his pride being hurt, giving a pound to the next combatant who he hands the mic off too. This cohesion of the freestyle cipher differs tremendously with the cutthroat nature of the Rap Industrial Complex where competition is based on a profit-centered model akin to neoliberalism, rather than one that encourages individual and collective growth as hip-hop constituted originally. More significantly to my fieldwork, these types of spaces allow hip-hop headz to gain the embodied capital required to know how to handle ones' self within the cipher.

In this space the MC's skills are not measured by record sales, automobiles or glowing write-ups in magazines, but the rewards are still quite tangible nonetheless. Frowns or looks of perplexity generally were translated to mean that you were wack and failed to move the crowd. Some of the MC's who were best received did well by getting the crowd on their side early by drawing upon some collective reference points within the Hip-Hop Nation. A large Latin man with a red backwards baseball cap for example began his rhyme by asking the crowd, "Can I kick it?" By incorporating this phrase, familiar to the seasoned hip hop head, the MC was working from the assumption that he and most

audience members worked from a common reference point. In this case, the classic A Tribe Called Quest song from 1990 where the song's chorus asks "Can I kick it" was able to re-energize the crowd following a particularly dismal freestyle performance. The audience received the cue and enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity to participate in the performance by yelling back "yes you can." These tactics will not hold the crowd for very long, however. The audience wants very much to lend their collective energy to the MC but it is clear that they will not be won over easily. No MC is ever booed at Sub-t, but the crowd is very stingy with its applause. Of the 15 MC's on average per night, I never observed more than 4 per evening leaving to a round of applause, which told an MC that the crowd was particularly impressed with your freestyle rhyme. Clearly possessing overflowing quantities of embodied capital, the crowd also knew who was kicking a choppy freestyle (or spontaneous) rhyme and who was taking the open mic opportunity to kick a rhyme that was written. Even the most skillful of lyricists did not receive any applause if they were believed to be posing a written rhyme as a freestyle. Some especially skillful MC's made it a point to rhyme about things that were happening in front of them to prove their freestyle scholarship, much to the mild embarrassment of one woman who was eating a chicken wing at the moment that she caught an MC's eye from the cipher. Taking these safeguards were important for a savvy audience that was quick to make note of even the slightest breach of MC etiquette. "They need to hold the mic closer to their mouth," whispers the tall white man with an L.A. Angels jersey on. "Speak louder!" he yells at the MC's to no avail. The more seasoned MC's don't have to be told this as they can be heard clearly, holding the mic steady and close to their mouths. "See this dude's a pro. He knows how to hold the mic so you can hear what the fuck he

sayin” the Angels fan comments to me. “It sounds fucked, but you gotta damn near deep throat that motherfucker.” While Pro Headz may not take the matter quite that far, they did acknowledge that open mic freestyle battles were important in cultivating the requisite chops to put on a good live show. Without heavy institutional backing, putting on a good live show is an absolute must for Pro Heads in the Hip-Hop Nation. For many, connecting on this personal level may be their one and only chance to connect with some individuals in the audience. These spaces are essential for Pro Headz to receive the necessary training to become fully sufficient in their craft in a way that can’t be done in the recording studio or on a video shoot. Without question there were some who attempted to take advantage of their moment in the cipher to promote themselves for commercial benefits (like one rapper who incorporated his Myspace address into his rhyme), and my guess would be that none of the MC’s I sat down with would run away from any wealth that could come from performing their craft. But this exercise goes beyond its benefits in the market economy as we see in most mainstream considerations of hip-hop culture. In fact these artists actually had to pay to participate in the open mic. \$5 was not much to ask but it’s far different than what we’d expect in the Rap Industrial Complex. Though Alfonso felt that he had been got by this hustle, somehow most of the combatants at Subterranean’s open mic night didn’t seem cheated because their money was recycled within the Hip-Hop Nation before (or if) it made its way back to neoliberal America.

While the neoliberalized Rap Industrial Complex has a winner-take-all mentality, at the end of the night at Sub-T, there is no officially declared winner. There is no need to uphold one and downgrade other MC’s. It is more important that there is a space for

expression, though the crowd and the MC's have a sense of the night's pecking order. The open mic freestyle battle fulfills the need for competition without placing judgment on individual expression. The freestyle ciphers in Subterranean also display the diversity of the city, where minority voices can have access to public forums denied them at City Hall. One white man makes no attempts to solicit a ghetto pass as he rhymes on his being from the suburbs and how he is comfortable in what he called his own "pale skin." The Chinese rapper disempowers any would-be racists by making fun of his own "chinky" eyes that he says is the result of smoking marijuana not any ethnic traits, which merits a huge roar from the audience. Another rapper represents the West Side with pride, incorporating vernacular that is totally foreign to some of his North Side neighbors just five miles away. Two Latino MC's switch back and forth between Spanish and English in their freestyle, making no efforts to translate for most of the monolingual audience. The dialect, word play and subject matter inside the ciphers of Subterranean draw upon the boundaries in Chicago in a way that reflects pride rather than conflict. And most significantly, it is a space where dynamics of race and class have far less value than they do in the Rap Industrial Complex. These exchanges also reveal why many Refugees saw the Hip-Hop Nation as a place of refuge from an America where they felt constrained and unable to dissect race and class in such expressive ways. The most skilled MC that I observed; who consistently received the most applause when rocking the mic, was a white dude whose clever wordplay and interaction with the audience made him a crowd favorite. My respondents seemed to feel that race had huge impacts on their life outcomes in America at-large, but within the sanctuary of sites such as Sub-t they are able to come together in what I believe are truly more equitable terms. The open mic represents true

meritocracy. Your class or racial background could impact your subject matter to some degree, but the audience on most nights seemed much more interested in who could make them think a little, while entertaining them, regardless of their background. Gender is still a point that needs to be addressed, however, as only two females rocked the mic during the entire nine months of my fieldwork at Sub-t.

Nonetheless, in a city where over 500 people had been the victims of gun deaths by July, many of these young Chicagoans could have been into many other things on a Tuesday night in June, but instead they ventured to the Hip-Hop Nation where “peace is not the word to play” (Main Source 1991), but something that was demanded of individuals sharing that space. I got a sense that the only way that violence would erupt here, would be if an individual tried to disturb the collective peace. Not only are spaces like Sub-t an important part of the Hip-Hop Nation because they allow for a battle of wits rather than a battle of firearms, but they represent an important source of individual self-affirmation. There is a respect for the history and cultural aesthetics of hip-hop that would satisfy even the most old-school Hip-Hop Fundamentalist. Refugees are able to wield power in the Hip-Hop Nation by crafting race in a way that is not generally available in America-at-large. While we haven’t yet found a way to get more hours in the day for Tech Headz who have trouble making time for shared space, with a pricetag of \$5 at least they will have more economic incentive. Clearly, the observations at Sub-t show the limitations in experiencing hip-hop exclusively through your computer. Pro Headz have an excellent opportunity to hone their skills, develop a reputation, make other professional networks and begin to cultivate a following. Without heavy institutional backing, putting on a good live show is an absolute must for Pro Headz in the Hip-Hop

Nation. For many, connecting on this personal level may be their one and only chance to connect with some individuals in the audience. These spaces are essential for Pro Headz to receive the necessary training to become fully proficient in their craft in a way that can't be done in the recording studio or on a video shoot. And finally, Black Headz have a space where blackness is the norm and it is experienced in a way that is dignified and possesses more self-determination.

These experiences are something that my participants couldn't put a price on. Unfortunately, however, enemy forces *are* putting prices on these experiences. For many of my participants they are consistently finding that the price of entry is more than they are willing to pay. To be sure, there will always be ciphers somewhere. But they are increasingly being localized and these citywide exchanges are becoming an endangered species. Some of the primary spaces set aside for the Hip-Hop Nation, such as Stardust, Otis' and Sinibar are no longer around, showing the fluid ground that Chicago's Hip-Hop Nation stands upon. In this way, the Hip-Hop Nation is a nation of refugees (not to be confused with Refugees), hopping from spot to spot, trying to find a home before the state runs them off again. Without having much direct control over any physical space of its own, the Hip-Hop Nation often finds itself gathering at the whims of state and corporate mechanisms that have wholly revealed themselves to be very hostile towards them at worst, and view them as irrelevant at best. And this scene has often proven itself not to be the most favorable work environment for those in the hip-hop economy from which a significant portion of their income is derived. But a careful peak beneath the surface shows that in reality the Hip-Hop Nation does not actually control these spaces either. Where we do see inequality is who gets to put on these productions, as several

respondents noted, there are not many blacks in positions to throw these kinds of bashes. Kerry (a Chicago DJ for over a decade) also provided insight into how hip-hop headz are often treated as second-class citizens in Chicago nightlife, exposing some of the ways that stereotypes about hip-hop reflect institutional biases that affect the independent vibrancy of the Hip-Hop Nation.

I'd say one of the main things that club owners say about the hip hop crowd is that they don't tip. Working in that industry you see the importance of people like waitresses and bartenders. And that's what they do, a lot of them, it's not a part-time gig. So yeah that's a huge turnoff. So the people who work there are pissed off and if they don't make any money they're gonna leave. So when you have nights where people don't tip, it doesn't work. I would say that's one of the main things. And then also we kind of saw some resistance at Katakomb when we were playing a lot of indie stuff, we'd bring in a pretty mixed crowd but people weren't dressed to the level that they wanted. They didn't have a dress code, but people are coming in, pants are huge, t-shirts go down to the ankles. It was kind of like they invest a ton of money into something and they want a clean looking place like "wow this place looks sharp" And the race side of it, it also plays in. A lot of club owners and bar owners, want a diverse crowd. And -this is because they don't pay attention- they're afraid that if it's hip-hop it will be an all black crowd. And what I said to them a couple of times is like "what's the problem if everyone's paying?" If you give something enough time, you're going to see that all kind of people are into it. When they would bring up the race thing, and talk about how they want a diverse club I'd be like "you gotta be kidding me. We've had nights in here where it's 95 percent white and you didn't have a problem with that." And they get all defensive. You kind of know down inside where they feel uncomfortable. But I never worked in a bar or a club where the owner or manager is black. It's generally foreign people to be honest. Europeans. And to them hip-hop was kind of the music of lower class. Obviously now a lot of those people are thinking twice because now it's where the money's at. Whether it's in advertising, whether it's in music, whether it's in clothing design, that's where you gotta be if you want to make money now. I feel good about the fact that I was ok with all of it before the money was even an option.

Despite these best laid efforts of the city and private enterprise, hip-hop still exists and showed itself to be more diverse, democratic and collective than the state borders that lie just outside the doors of Subterranean. It is necessary that these spaces be maintained for many of my participants to feel fully alive within the culture. These good feelings are increasingly difficult to capture for a Chicago hip-hop community battling with neoliberalized forces as well as itself. While this dissertation takes a critical position on neoliberalism for its overzealous and solitary focus on consumption, by the same token capital is still a treasured and necessary resource for the continued growth of the Hip-Hop Nation. Not only does it cost more and more for the public to participate in hip-hop in

Chicago, artists such as Alfonso say that the lack of industrial capital makes it difficult for artists to bring hip-hop music to the public.

Part of the challenge of cultivating more personalized battlefronts is that neoliberalism puts supreme challenges to individual autonomy as people increasingly are having to be responsible for so many things that once were the domain of government. The goal of subjecting all of life to considerations of finance exclusively is that it actually works to cut individual's social bonds to one another. The culture of neoliberalism has made it more difficult for the Hip-Hop Nation to maintain local bonds to one another. With privatization of media and public space, the Hip-Hop Nation is finding it difficult to maintain the local networks that are at the center of hip-hop's lifeblood.

## CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSIONS

*Uh, who shot biggie smalls?  
 If we dont get them, they gonna get us all  
 Im down for runnin up on them crackers in they city hall  
 We ride for yall, all my dogs stay real  
 Nigga dont think these record deals gonna feed your seeds  
 And pay your bills because they not  
 Mcs get a little bit of love and think they hot  
 Talkin bout how much money they got, all yall records sound the same  
 I'm sick of that fake thug, r & b, rap scenario all day on the radio  
 Same scenes in the video, monotonous material, yall dont here me though  
 These record labels slang our tapes like dope  
 You can be next in line, and signed, and still be writing rhymes and broke  
 You would rather have a lexus, some justice, a dream or some substance?  
 A Beamer, a necklace or freedom?  
 -Dead Prez "Hip-Hop" -*

### 7.1 - Conclusions

Some conclusions taken away from this dissertation include my contention that all of the aforementioned hip-hop identities found in my fieldwork are increasingly under attack by neoliberal capitalism. I also found that although much has been written on the misogyny of hip-hop, that black women who have immersed themselves in the culture see this relationship in a far different light. And while they acknowledge their second class position in the Hip-Hop Nation, it is the women who I found to have a much stronger black racial consciousness than the men. When discussions developed in regard to sexism in hip-hop, most of the black women I spoke with were quick to shift the blame to American society at-large. There seemed to be fewer outlets, however, for black women whose identities are shaped primarily through gender rather than race. There is also evidence that black men have abused their power overall within the Hip-Hop Nation as my non-black male informants indicated that there is much work to be done to allow them to feel fully comfortable as equal citizens of the Hip-Hop Nation. Finally, because of the intrusion of neoliberalism hip-hop runs the risk of becoming a bourgeois project

only accessible to middle class individuals who have advantages in regard to access, knowledge and technical skill.

Many in this Hip-Hop Nation, which I contend can only be unearthed through extensive ethnographic work, imagine themselves as being involved in a war that has been declared upon them by America. The hip-hop headz that I spoke to in my nine-month study in Chicago said that one of the primary manners in which they experienced this war is by having their active participation in the Hip-Hop Nation constrained by the everyday realities of neoliberal capitalism and its unwavering focus on conspicuous consumption. This has particularly been significant in assessing which black identities are sold to the public and which identities are kept from public view. As hip-hop was originally experienced in its unaltered form, it provided a medium to reaffirm the collective identities of the black poor. But what identities are being sold if black, poor people can no longer afford to participate collectively in hip-hop as is increasingly the case in Chicago? As social ties get broken in the name of the free market, neoliberalism is forcing people into a survival of the fittest mentality that is foreign to the collective ideals of the Hip-Hop Nation. Much of the potential for the Hip-Hop Nation to organize is being undermined by a heartless neoliberalism that forces people away from public spaces and instead view themselves as sets of private entities, wholly responsible for themselves. For individuals who subscribe to this philosophy, their civic responsibility ends at their door step. Collectivism is not sound enterprise under neoliberalism and this reality limits the agency of many of the hip-hop headz who were the subject of my study.

And while the hip-hop headz who make up the Hip-Hop Nation have made efforts to fight off the enterprise cultural values of neoliberalism by re-educating their children, re-working the meaning of their gender positions in America, and ushering in new perspectives in the halls of government, they are lacking the institutional might necessary to sustain this as a model that young people can turn to instead of the get-rich-quick, mythical pyramid schemes they are sold through neoliberalism. America's war on the Hip-Hop Nation has revealed itself to be especially problematic in Chicago where the public gatherings that were at the heart of hip-hop's creation are more difficult to sustain. Both the prohibitive cost and official public policy has limited the space in which Chicago's hip-hop community can gather. Whether deliberate or not, the Hip-Hop Nation sees the space for alternative visions being reduced by the consumer capitalism edicts to which neoliberalism is so reliant. Furthermore, the public spaces made available for progressive ideals in hip-hop will be weakened if they do not begin to include more members of the uneducated, working class. This is the backbone of the Hip-Hop Nation, after all. If the hip-hop headz who claim to be patriots of the Hip-Hop Nation are not more proactive, they will find their culture privatized like more and more consumer goods in neoliberalism. And while this elimination of public space is troubling for people of all backgrounds, it has especially destructive consequences for the young blacks in Chicago who proved to be extremely vulnerable and expendable during the course of my research where there seemed to be a new casualty to gun violence every day.

There is hope, however, in that the cold detachment of neoliberalism is causing old bonds to erode which is helping to speed up the elimination of whiteness. My white respondents in the Hip-Hop Nation reject whiteness as it has been defined and valued in

Americanized terms. Whiteness, and the privilege that comes with it was not created in a generation, so it will take time to slay this dragon that always rears its hideous head when America finds itself in a bind. But through the shared space of Hip-Hop, whiteness has been very much transformed in some ways that represent some hope for how race will be defined in future years. One of the byproducts of neoliberalism is that people have defined themselves less in modernistic terms of nationality, race, gender and religion. With the election of the first black president who some have suggested ushered in a post-racial age, it is significant to explore the ways that young hip-hop professionals identify themselves in these fluid times. The Hip-Hop Nation has its own inherent prejudices and biases such as those against homosexuals, but nonetheless the sites of exchange within hip-hop represent more potential for exporting democratic principles than neoliberal government, politics and culture has been able to in the last 30 years. The hip-hop rituals of graffiti, breakdancing, and the cipher represent a true meritocracy where color, religion and income take a back seat to a consideration of whether or not someone has skills. The public experiences and meeting points of the Hip-Hop Nation did serve as sources where these imaginations could be tested and negotiated in ways that contradicted some of the more limiting frames of the Rap Industrial Complex.

Ultimately most of the hip-hop headz I spoke to believed that the time was over to wait for help from an overburdened America that can barely help itself these days. Dead Prez is quite correct when they rhyme that this is far bigger than hip-hop. The Hip-Hop Nation is a movement that has everything necessary to serve as a living, breathing alternative to neoliberalism except for formal infrastructure. When the Hip-Hop Nation first came to life in South Bronx block parties in the early 1970s it did so by plugging the

chords from the speakers into the light posts to steal electrical power from a city they felt had denied them political and economic power for decades. The time has come, however, for the Hip-Hop Nation to stop relying on America's juice. It is absolutely essential for its survival for the Hip-Hop Nation to create some independent outlets. Another great concern that the Hip-Hop Nation must overcome is how some of the more progressive elements of hip-hop are only accessible to those who have the cultural capital to access it. Those who don't have internet access, money for public events or insider knowledge are at a considerable disadvantage for utilizing some of the more empowering aspects of hip-hop. Those who do not have this costly access to hip-hop are forced to have their view of the culture informed by the Rap Industrial Complex which profits off of black stereotypes that reinforce neoliberal philosophy. My participants defined hip-hop quite differently than it is understood in mainstream mediums of radio, TV media and video. America historically has seem disinterested in allowing blacks a voice in the public square culturally, economically or politically that didn't conform to the most passive and self-destructive notions of blackness. The Rap Industrial Complex can never transform its goals to fall in lock-step with the Hip-Hop Nation. Whether it be the minstrel rapper or what McLaren (1995) calls the *bad nigger*, (the violent, psychopath that America caricatured during the mid 1990s when they first learned that rap was big business) any notions that this cycle will change are delusional. The materialistic minstrel coon may be replaced by another character, but there can be no expectations that this figure will be one that the Hip-Hop Nation (and Black Headz in particular) can look upon as a productive and independent model. The Rap Industrial Complex is a system that must be destroyed for the Hip-Hop Nation to reach its full potential. Rappers and consumers alike must

attempt to boycott it in all its forms if they are truly serious about Hip-Hop's liberation. There will always be limits on individual and collective autonomy so long as the Hip-Hop Nation must turn to these external institutions to present its views to the world. Under the present system a few slaves will eat well at the table for a little while, but no crumbs will be forthcoming for the rest who will continue to fight among themselves to the unrestrained amusement of the field boss.

Like any fight for independence, this will be an extremely difficult transformation. This process is going to take vision, patience, focus and discipline. Too often, hip-hop headz have looked to cash in and sacrifice the principles of the culture in their attempts to obtain wealth that is often found to be a fleeting mirage. Part of this will involve taking steps that would be unheard of under neoliberal capitalism such as giving away the culture for free. While this would seem to be career suicide for some rap artists, DJ's and hip-hop documentarians on the surface, in the long term this may be the most effective marketing scheme for politically conscious messages to reach large numbers of poor people. In many ways, the culture is already being given away for free. More and more rap artists have to come to grips with the fact that, through internet downloading and file sharing, much of what they produce will reach the market free-of-charge whether they like it or not. Part of this is a reaction to a music industry that has insisted on watering down product to masses that haven't proven to be quite as dumb as the record company CEO's and radio program directors had counted on. This pirating of music and lowered sells expectations has made producing a record considerably more of a risk than it was even 10 years ago. The decision makers in the Rap Industrial Complex have been especially averse to risk-taking as the product output on BET showed us. So underground

artists who inject socio-political issues into their work (and are subsequently not afforded large marketing budgets) find that putting out free music is the only real opportunity to build an audience. The calculation is that this will create a larger audience than would have been cultivated without the free advertising, and many people will still go out and purchase truly good art even if they have access to a bootleg. More significantly underground artists hope that this exposure would make people want to attend live shows since they can't easily access their favorite artist through video. This not only will require more collective gatherings in hip-hop, but allows the artist to receive a considerably larger percentage of the purse than they receive for each record sold.

We also see my proposal at work through the many rap artists who are working on free mixtapes that involve rappers rhyming over familiar beats. These mixtapes are used to reach audiences deep in urban cores that the record companies can't reach. Mixtapes are a return to early hip-hop music in the regard that their circulation is highly reliant upon word-of-mouth in the ghetto. Rappers are no longer relying on A&R's who are culturally detached from the experiences described in the music. More and more rappers are taking their music directly to the street. One artist of note that may have changed the way rappers do business in the immediate future is New Orleans rapper, Lil Wayne. Lil Wayne rapped on every mixtape and cameo that came his way over a period of two years after disappointing sales for his 2005 album, *The Carter II*. He made appearances with rappers and singers from a variety of genres during this time period, with the sole focus of keeping his name constantly in the public eye. Wayne's investment was successful as he reached many different markets that would translate to his album, *The Carter III*, going platinum in a week, particularly impressive in an especially

sluggish period in the record industry that has been particularly brutal on rap music. The album was the fastest to go platinum in any genre in 2008.

It is important to note that Lil Wayne was working from a position of considerable wealth from previous works in making this career calculation. So it isn't exactly time to start erecting any statues in his honor alongside Gandhi or Nelson Mandela. But Lil Wayne's underground marketing strategy shows how working in some ways that are unconventional to neoliberalism does not mean that individuals have to sacrifice economic empowerment. My research respondents revealed even more ways that hip-hop can be utilized to subvert traditional neoliberal orthodoxy. And there were others who demonstrate this type of agency within the Hip-Hop Nation who I was unable to include in my research because of their heavy time commitments. T.J. Crawford, head of the Chicago chapter of the National Hip-Hop Political Action Committee, has been particularly active in organizing the hip-hop voting block. And Amina Norman and Urbanized Music worked with local city councilman Walter Burnett to have July recognized as National Hip-Hop Month in Chicago. On the national scene, one of the more developed institutions to emerge from the Hip-Hop Nation was the Temple of Hip-Hop which formed in 1996 with the explicit goal of laying out some formal principles for a culture that many of its founders felt was increasingly losing its way as commercial interests began to take precedent over the social consciousness of hip-hop. The organization claims a membership of 80,000 worldwide. The Temple of Hip Hop has organized forums, provided educational workshops, conducted its own census of hip hop headz globally, and in 2001 formally declared hip-hop as an international culture of peace and prosperity before the United Nations. This declaration, written by KRS-1, Afrika

Bambaatta, Kool Herc, Pop Master Fabel and others, listed 18 principles to guide hip-hop headz throughout the world. Some of these principles included taking hip-hop beyond entertainment, working to eliminate poverty worldwide, seeking diplomatic solutions to conflict and educating one's self. It is noteworthy that The Temple of Hip-Hop sought to submit this to an international body rather than seek some Congressional Resolution to make the recognition. This contrasts dramatically with the American nationalism that has become so in vogue stateside where politicians have demonstrated their patriotism by bragging on the campaign trail that they don't own a passport, as if being detached from a rapidly globalizing world is a good thing. By presenting the declaration to the United Nations, the Hip-Hop Nation not only viewed themselves as citizens of the world, but also see themselves as separate and autonomous to the United States. Hip-hop headz have found ways to empower themselves in Chicago through hip-hop by creating their own autonomous institutions which is a promising shift away from the tendency to try and win the war against neoliberalism through a series of small, personalized victories that headz hope would eventually make the old giant grow tired and weak.

When observers make commentaries on whether or not hip-hop reinforces the neoliberal ideals of individualism, conspicuous consumption and short-term solutions to complex problems it is important to distinguish between which messages are produced by the Hip-Hop Nation and the Rap Industrial Complex. "Cash Rules Everything Around Me" makes a valuable contribution in that it shows some of the small ways that individuals who identify with the values and goals associated with the Hip-Hop Nation can find some strategies in which to empower themselves in their own personalized wars with neoliberalism. It also is important in that readers will leave with a more complex

comprehension of hip-hop culture than what is generally presented as hip-hop in mainstream mediums domestically and abroad. Most importantly, I hope that this dissertation makes a valuable contribution to the hip-hop community in Chicago who helped to make this research possible in the first place. By seeing how some of their individual stories tie together, perhaps Chicago can work in more collective ways that will allow for more space to gather without requiring the consent of hostile civic and private interests.

Selfishly, if “CREAM” contributes nothing else, this work was phenomenally therapeutic for me. I fell in love with hip-hop all over again and remembered many of the reasons that I fell head over heels in love with it in the first place after initially trying to front like I was just smitten. For this, I need to thank my participants who were incredibly generous with their time, their resources, their food & beverages and most importantly, their candor.

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## Appendix A- IRB Questionnaire

**The general interview topics for participants that I will include in my research are as follows: media consumption, public access to hip-hop, fashion trends, political views**

### **Some *Media Consumption* questions include:**

-How do you generally access the rap music you listen to? Radio, TV, internet, other?

-How do you become aware of news and information regarding hip-hop like tours, upcoming album releases and even gossip surrounding various artists?

-What are some of the independent record labels that you know of in Chicago?

-Have there been motion pictures or documentaries reflective of hip-hop culture that you are aware of? How did you access them?

-How would you characterize the news media's relationship with hip-hop culture? What are some examples that characterize this relationship?

### ***Public Access to Hip-Hop***

-Where are most of the events related to hip-hop held in Chicago?

-Would you say there is a low, moderate or high police presence at these events?

-Where does the funding for most of these events come from to your knowledge?

### ***Fashion Trends***

-Describe how a male who is into hip-hop would be dressed?

-Describe how a female who is into hip-hop would be dressed?

-What are some of the more popular brand names that you see people wearing at the hip-hop events you attend?

-Is fashion a major source of local rap subject matter in your opinion? What impacts does this have on consumer practices in your view?

-Who are some hip-hop clothing companies?

***Political Trends***

-Who are some rappers that you would characterize as political? Why would you refer to them this way?

-Who are some American rappers that you would characterize as political? Why would you refer to them this way?

-What issues do you think that American rappers should address more?

-Have there been any social policies that you think the hip-hop community has directly affected in the United States?

## **Appendix B - Questions for Interview Sessions and Field Work**

### **Biographical**

What's your age?

Where do you work?

What is your highest completed grade level?

If you went to college, what was your major?

What made you choose this major?

How do you pay for college?

What is your income level?

What would be a practical income to sustain your current lifestyle?

Do you have health benefits at your job?

Do you suffer from any major illnesses or been subjected to any extended hospital time in the past three years?

Is your job unionized?

Would you join the union if offered? Why or why not?

How did you find out about the job you work in now?

Do you like your job? Why or why not?

Tell me about your closest friends? Where were they born? Are they white, black? Women, men? What is your common bond with them?

What do you and your friends do when you hang out?

Where were you born?

Where else have you lived besides Chicago?

Growing up, did you live with both parents?

What did they do for a living?

Do you have children?

Would you like to have children?

In what ways do world events today impact your decision on forming a family?

What world events in particular impact this decision?

What are some of the biggest challenges you feel you have to deal with day-to-day?

Think back ten years ago, what were some of the biggest day-to-day challenges you faced then?

How long have you lived here? What was the process like for you to find housing? What factors influenced your decision to live here?

What was the last book you read?

Are there any books that you've read because of hip-hop?

Who were your role models growing up?

Do you have health insurance?

How many times do you go out to dinner a month?

Do you have any military service? Would you consider military service? Why or why not?

What do you do for recreation?

What are extra luxuries for you?

Describe how you think Chicago will be structured in 20 years?

Describe America in 20 years.

Where do you see yourself in 20 years?

In what ways would your life have been different if there was no hip-hop?

***Public Access to Hip-Hop***

What is hip hop?

The rap recording artist Nas released an album in late 2006 where he proclaimed that hip-hop is dead? Is it? Why or why not?

Is hip hop a black culture?

If so, what about hip-hop makes it a black culture?

Do you consider hip-hop an American culture?

What aspects of hip-hop are American?

What does hip-hop's creation owe to forces and individuals outside of America?

What does the term hip-hop nation mean? Who's in the hip-hop nation?

How do you actively participate in hip-hop?

How do you access most of your music?

Where do you go to access hip hop in Chicago? How do you get there?

Is there anyone who feel should not be a welcomed participant in hip-hop?

Are there any rap artists who you feel are not representative of hip-hop culture? Why?

Are there any principles identifiable with hip-hop culture? What are they?

How did you learn of these principles?

Are there any magazines, blogs or other sources that you use to access news about hip-hop?

What's good about today's rap music?

What's bad about today's rap music?

If you saw someone on the street, would you be able to tell that they were hip-hop without talking to them? How so? How might they be dressed?

What did you wear to the last hip-hop event you attended?

Where do you shop for these clothes?

Do you know where your clothes are made? Is the origin of products you consume something that you consider in making a purchase?

How does hip-hop culture influence the way you raise your children?

Where in the city are most of the events related to hip-hop held?

Would you say there is a low, moderate or high police presence at these events?

Where does the funding for most of these events come from to your knowledge?

What are your earliest memories of hip-hop?

Were there other elements of the culture that you got into besides rapping?

Are there different categories of hip-hop music?

What do you see as the gender norms in hip-hop culture? What are these rooted in?

How are these gender norms different from what you see in America at large?

How does hip-hop reproduce some of these gender norms?

What was your take on the Don Imus controversy?

Attending a rap concert and even the process of listening to rap music is an interactive process, but tell me beyond listening to rap music, what are some ways that you have personally been active in local hip-hop culture? This can entail promotions to charity donations, etc.

Will you be active in hip-hop ten years from now? Why or why not?

What do you think when you see hip-hop culture depicted on television? In what ways do these images reflect the reality of hip-hop culture? In what ways do these images deviate from the reality of hip-hop culture?

In what ways would you consider yourself typical of the average hip-hopper in America?

In what ways do you think you differ from the average hip-hopper in America?

What about hip-hop distinguishes you from other Americans?

Who are some rappers that you would characterize as political? Why would you refer to them this way?

Who are some foreign rappers that you would characterize as political? Why would you refer to them this way?

What issues do you think that American rappers should address more and why?

### ***Fashion Trends and Artifacts***

Describe how a male who is into hip-hop would be dressed?

Describe how a female who is into hip-hop would be dressed?

What are some of the more popular brand names that you see people wearing at the hip-hop events you attend?

Who are some hip-hop clothing companies?

### ***Political Trends***

Have there been any political causes that you've been actively involved in?

Have there been any social policies that you think the hip-hop community has directly affected?

Did you vote in the last election?

What are some issues you'd like to see some of the candidates in this presidential election discuss? Are you seeing them discussed so far?

Where do you get your news on the presidential election

What's the most pressing issue for young people in America?

What's the most pressing issue for black people in America?

What are some ways that you believe hip-hop has effected socio-political change?

In what ways, if any, do you see hip-hop culture as an extension of prior black political movements?

In what ways, if any, do see hip-hop breaking from traditoanl black political movements?

## **Global Imaginations**

Does the term globalization mean anything to you?

Have you ever used foreign currency? What was it? What was your purchasing power like in comparison to what that money could purchase in America?

Have you traveled outside of the U.S.?

Do you have a passport?

What does it mean to be an American?

How are these ideals of what it means to be an American reinforced in rap music?

Are there any places outside the U.S. you'd like to go?

In what ways has hip-hop connected you to the world outside of America?

What are some global issues that you've been made aware of through hip-hop?

How do these issues affect your life?

Are there global issues that are not addressed in hip-hop that you feel should receive more attention?

Why don't these issues receive more attention in your view?

What are some foreign policy initiatives of the United States that you have taken a strong opinion of?

What are some foreign policy initiatives of the United States that you feel have had a positive global impact?

What do you think of the Olympics coming to Chicago? How will this global project effect the local population?

What was your reaction to the 9/11 attacks?

Who in your view was responsible for the 9/11 attacks?

How do you find out information about other parts of the world?

Is there news from other countries or regions that interest you over others? Why?

What is something that caught your interest from abroad in the past three months? How did you come across this information?

What do you feel is the most pressing issue for young people in the world?

Are there any foreign hip-hop artists music that you buy?

**Some *Media Consumption* questions include:**

How do you generally access the rap music you listen to? Radio, TV, internet, other?

How do you become aware of news and information regarding hip-hop like tours, upcoming album releases and even gossip surrounding various artists?

What are some of the major record labels that you know of?

What are some local, independent record labels that you know of?

Have there been motion pictures or documentaries reflective of hip-hop culture that you have seen in the last year? How did you access them?

How would you characterize the news media's relationship with hip-hop culture? What are some examples that characterize this relationship?

### Appendix C - Hip-Hop Questionnaire

-What CD's have you bought this year and where did you buy them? Why did you buy these particular CD's instead of others that you could have bought?

-In what **specific** ways do you think that your hip-hop perspective intersects with what you do for a living?

-What are some ideas, people, places & things that you feel ALL hip hop headz should be aware of?

-What do your friends & family say about your hip-hop ideals & principles?

-Who are some artists that you feel are misidentified as being hip-hop? Why don't you consider them hip-hop?

-Beyond the music that one listens to, how they dress, whether they rhyme, breakdance or do graffiti, what do you think are some typical characteristics of a hip-hop head?

-Who is your quintessential hip hop role model and why?

-Have any of your friends ever become disillusioned with hip-hop and has that affected your friendship at all?

-What's the proper role for whites in hip hop? Blacks in hip hop?

-Do you find yourself going to more or fewer hip-hop events now than a few years ago? If there has been a shift either way, why do you think that is? When did the shift start? 1998? 2000? 2003? 2005? 2008?

-Have you ever met someone who you found to be a hip-hop fraud in that they were fake and weren't really hip-hop in your opinion? Why did you consider them to be so?

-Tell me about the last five hip-hop events you attended?

-How many concerts have you've been to? Who've some artists you've seen?

-Are there any artists or songs that you consider mainstream that you like? Why do you like them? Why do you consider them mainstream?

-How many hip-hop CD's do you own? How many are bootlegs?

-In your room or house, what are some markers of hip-hop?

-What will Barack Obama's election mean for black folks?

-What role does spirituality play in your life?

-Have you personally been affected by the recent economic crisis? How has this impacted your relationship with hip hop?

-What are some ways that someone could disrespect hip-hop as a culture? Would this personally offend you?

**Vita**

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Graduate College Fellowship, University of Illinois, 2002, **\$15,000**

Academy for Alternative Journalism, Northwestern University, Summer, 2000, **\$5,000**

MacArthur Fellowship in International Studies Honors Award, University of Minnesota Fall 1999, **\$5,000**

Vernon Jarrett Scholarship, Chicago Association of Black Journalists, 1997, **\$1,500**

Max Robinson Scholarship, Chicago Association of Black Journalists, 1998, **\$2,500**

Graduated with Honors in Journalism, Northwestern University, December 2001

National Deans List, 1999

All-American Scholar, 1999

Graduated with Honors in Technical Writing, Chicago State University, December, 1999

Steps Toward Empowerment and Professionalism for Students Leadership Certificate, 1998

#### **PUBLISHED WORK:**

“Hip-Hopping Across the Globe: The Subculture of Hip-Hop’s Use as a Social Tool Internationally,” University of Minnesota, Summer, 1999.

“The Value of Journalism The Print Media’s Role in Ending Apartheid in South Africa,” University of Minnesota, Summer, 1998.

“Not Quite as Free Reynolds Settling In” *The Daily Southtown*, p.13, January 25, 2001.

“Reynolds Receives Job Offer” *The Illinois Times*, p. 8, January 25, 2001.

“NU Strives for Black Voice on White Campus” *The CABJ Chronicle*, p. 5. Spring, 1999

“Tillman Calls for Reparations,” *The CABJ Chronicle*, Vol. 6, no. 1, p. 1, Spring, 2001.

“Forest Preserve District to Receive \$160,000 in Supplies,” *The Times*, p. 16, February 22, 2001

“Rhoden Explores Intersection of Sports, Society,” *The Medillian*; p. 9-10, Spring, 2001

“Illinois Gets ‘C’ for Seat Belt Use,” *The Times of Northwest Indiana*, p.A1&7, July 13, 2001.

“Democrats Converge on Indianapolis,” *The Times of Northwest Indiana*, p.A5, July 14, 2001.

“Poll: Blacks, Whites View of World Differs,” *The Times of Northwest Indiana*, p.A1 &7, July 16, 2001.

“Lugar, Agriculture Secretary Push “Fast Track,” *The Times of Northwest Indiana*; p. A5, June 30, 2001.

“Congress Looking into Universal Rating System,” *The Times of Northwest Indiana*; p.A1&12, July 26, 2001.

“Jackson Attains Tae Kwon Do Black Belt,” *The Times of Illinois*, p.A1&7, July 25, 2001.

“Surviving in Heideveld Gangland,” *The Cape Argus*, p.5, October 22, 2001.

“Lower Export Tarrifs Boost for Agriculture: Positive Impact on Employment Expected,” *The Cape Argus*; p.7, November 14, 2001

“Jews’ Role in Struggle Remembered: Mandela Testifies to Commitment to Democratic Values of Lawyers, Activists,” *The Cape Argus*; p. 11, December 2, 2001.

“Visclosky Pushes for Patients Bill of Rights,” *The Times of Northwest Indiana*; p.E1&5, July 27, 2001.

“The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill offers Variety,” *Tempo*; p.11, November 4, 1998.

“Put it on Ice-Ice, Baby,” *Tempo*; p.11, November 4, 1998.

“Sexist Christmas Sign Scrapped,” *Cape Argus*; p.6, December 6, 2001

“Visclosky Stands up for Steel,” *The Times of Northwest Indiana*, p.E1&5, July 18, 2001.

“SA’s Informal Sector Boosts GDP – Study,” *Cape Argus*; p.7. October 25, 2001.

“Landmark Farming Code Promises a Fairer Deal,” *Cape Argus*; p.4, October 26, 2001.

“Refugee Artist Makes Good in City,” *Cape Argus*; p.12, November 23, 2001.

“Timer Ticks for Car Parkers: New Law Enforcement Scheme Leaves Informal Attendants out of Loop,” *Cape Argus*; p.7, November 9, 2001.

**CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION (SELECTED):**

“All About the Benjamins Baby: Resistance, Hegemony and the Business of Hip-Hop Culture.” “Fifth International Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference, June 25-28, 2004. University of Illinois.

“Pearly Whites: Minstrelsy’s Connection to Contemporary Rap Music.” Midwestern Sociological Conference. April 5-8, 2007. Chicago, Illinois.

Panelist: “The First Amendment and Music.” Constitution Day Commemoration, Chicago State University, September 17, 2007.

### **Author's Biography**

Kareem R. Muhammad was born on March 31, 1975. After receiving his Masters in Journalism from Northwestern University, and a Bachelors in Technical Writing at Chicago State, he pursued his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois in Sociology. He has taught a wide range of courses including the first "Sociology of Hip-Hop Course" at the University of Illinois. Presently he teaches a variety of criminology, sociology and political science courses at East-West University in Chicago.

Kareem is also the CEO of Illanoyze, Inc a hip-hop media, promotion and fashion company based in Chicago. He and his two partners began the company in 1998 to provide an array of services to the disenfranchised in the form of clothing, shelter, entertainment and information. In addition to the clothing line that commonly features various political messages such as ones that include police dogs attacking black protesters in 1960s Detroit, and a graphic lynching in a rural Indiana town in the 1920s, Illanoyze has also been highly involved in charity and volunteer work throughout the city. Recently Illanoyze began a talk show that hosted by Kareem entitled "Noyzemakers: The Talk Show of Hip-Hop, Politics and Entertainment."