The World Is Yours: The Radical and Deterritorializing Nature of Hip-Hop

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The World Is Yours: The Radical and Deterritorializing Nature of Hip-Hop

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To My Family, Susan Doran, and All the Kelvin Mercer Lookalikes

It's yours
Whose world is this?
The world is yours, the world is yours
It's mine, it's mine, it's mine; whose world is this?

-Nas

Since its inception in the early 1970s, Hip Hop has been defined as a cultural movement that is firmly grounded on the principles of socio-political radicalism, subversion, and change. Rap, which is often synonymous with Hip Hop, is the most recent example of the disenfranchised African-American community's attempt to gain equality through musical stylings.[1] Hip Hop has followed in the footsteps of the negro spiritual, the blues, jazz, and rock and roll. While each one of these musical genres has undeniably black roots, Hip Hop, in the words of the influential sociologist Michael Eric Dyson is, "emblematic of the glacial shift in aesthetic sensibilities between blacks of different generations… Rap reflects the intraracial class division that has plagued African-American communities for the last thirty years". (Dyson 7) In this sense, Hip Hop is more than just "a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music"(Rose 2). While this definition is correct in the most basic sense, the true nature of Hip Hop is infinitely more complicated and politically charged than its fundamental musical underpinnings would suggest.

Journalist Bakari Kitwana's exploration of hip-hop's early days in *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*, Reiland Rabaka's critically focused *Hip Hop's Inheritance* and Jeff Chang's

[1] Hip-Hop encompasses rap music, graffiti, and break dancing

anecdotal oral history *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation,* provide insight into hip-hop's historical importance in African-American culture. Both Kitwana and Rabaka assert that the Hip Hop generation can be defined by black Americans who were born between the end of the civil rights movement and the beginning of the neo-conservative policies implemented by President Ronald Reagan. The Hip Hop generation, then, at least from Kitwana and Rabaka's standpoint, encompasses those born between the years of 1965-1984 (Kitwana 3). However, Chang is hesitant to adopt Kitwana and Rabaka's relatively narrow definition, arguing, "Folks [get] bogged down… in the details…The Hip Hop Generation brings together time and race, place and polyculturalism, hot beats and hybridity" (Chang 2). While Chang acknowledges Kitwana's general timeline, he refuses to conform to a concrete timeline of the Hip Hop generation. On the other hand, Rabaka is "preoccupied with the origins and evolution of black popular culture and black popular music," focusing on black culture as a whole in order to gain a critical understanding of the genre.

Each author's timeline suits his respective purposes. I argue, however, that the synthesis of each author's definition of the Hip Hop generation provides the most effective way in which to critically approach Hip Hop. The most influential members of the Hip Hop generation fit neatly into Kitwana's timetable, but it is clear that the cultural predispositions of this era were not formed in a vacuum. Furthermore, the declaration that those born after the finite date of 1984 do not belong to the Hip Hop generation discounts contemporary artists who are now making the biggest impact on Hip Hop's future. Kind Rather than focusing on

issues of chronology and demographics, then, this study will focus on Hip-Hop's linguistic elements in order to demonstrate the political and cultural power of language in terms of a post-colonial lens.

The creation of Hip-Hop as an artistic movement owes itself to the conditions that were facing the black community following the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Although the civil rights movement initiated a huge step in the right direction for the black community's goal of equal rights, the 1970s - the decade in which Hip-Hop culture emerged - was far from immune from the racial prejudices that had defined the black population's existence for hundreds of years. The epicenter of Hip-Hop was in Bronx, New York. Under the infamous leadership of "master builder" Robert Moses, the Bronx became a place wholly disconnected from the other boroughs of New York City, and began to house poor blacks and Latinos. This disconnect, created by Moses's Cross-Bronx Expressway, caused middle class whites to flee the borough for the suburbs which in turn lowered real estate prices and created the opportunity to build low income public housing. Poverty and suffering soon came to define the Bronx. It became a place where, in the words of Chang, "Heroin dealers, junky thieves and contract arsonists filled the streets like vultures" (13). Amalia Batanzos, the Youth Services Agency commissioner in 1973, stated that the, "young male unemployment rate is 80%…there's no way out, it really does not matter if you're violent" (*"New York Illustrated: The Savage Skulls With Piri Thomas*). In short, the Bronx became a ghetto for the black community: a place where the lack of

ability for upward mobility and the oppressive thumb of the city government was ingrained in the borough's collective consciousness.

By 1973, The Bronx, in the words of a local clinic director, "was a necropolis - a city of death" (Tolchin). Due to a rash of insurance scams that rewarded greedy landlords for setting fire to their own buildings for the insurance money, the Bronx was literally burning to the ground. The Bronx was, to put it lightly, in dire straits. However, from the literal ashes of the borough emerged a new, dominantly black cultural movement: Hip-Hop. In the same year that Martin Tolchin was writing about the seemingly inevitable implosion of the Bronx, a man who went by DJ Kool Herc began to organize parties where he would mix and cut the sounds from different songs into his own unique style of music. He would charge a modest sum for entrance into the party, and then unleash his brand of DJing. It was at this juncture that Hip-Hop was born. Before long, Herc's style spread across the borough and the DJs began to speak, in the form of rhymed lyrics, over the hodgepodge of mixed beats and sounds (Chang 77). Although the violence and poverty did not disappear from the Bronx, "an enormous amount of creative energy was now ready to be released from the bottom of American society… [and] eventually echo around the world" (Chang 82).

In the years that followed, Hip-Hop culture - and especially rap music - spread from New York to the rest of the country. Although those born into the middle of the "Hip-Hop Generation" were among the first to experience life outside the confines of official segregation they were, as seen in the Bronx during the 1970s, still very much on the margins of the dominant culture (Kitwana 13).

In place of true societal assimilation, black youths had found a new way to express their frustration with the social order in the form of beats and lyrics. Rap gave young blacks, in the words of Kitwana, "a medium through which to share a… culture" (10).

At the same time that Hip-Hop began to define the black disenfranchised voice in the United States, theorists began to examine the role of colonialism in literature. By the time Hip-Hop was coming in to its own as a form of art, the Civil Rights movement had already made a large impact on American life, in no small part due to the emerging philosophical discourses that were dominating the academic community. Theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari ground themselves in a postcolonial lens, meaning that they viewed literature that was written from the margins of society as "an engagement with, and contestation of, colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies" (Gilbert 2). In essence, the new theory focused on literature's ability to form a new, radical voice for artists who had long been oppressed by the language and societal structures of their respective cultures.

In 1975, two years after DJ Kool Herc started to organize parties centered around his Hip-Hop style, French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari published *Kafka: Toward a Theory of Minor Literature*. The book, drawing from the critical theory of post-colonialism, sought to define Franz Kafka's work in a way that emphasized the Czech-German Jew's role as an outsider in society. Deleuze and Guattari posited that, "Kafka[s work] marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague… The impossibility of not writing

because national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, necessarily exists by means of literature"(16). Because Kafka was an outsider within the society he was born into, Deleuze and Guattari argue that his writings were inherently political and aimed at finding a new voice outside the dominant literary traditions. The two theorists go on to say that "The literary machine thus becomes the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come, not at all for ideological reasons but because the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking elsewhere in this milieu: literature is the people's concern" (18).

As I argued in my essay, "Hip-Hop and Minor Literature: The Deconstruction and Reterritorialization of Black Identity," In essence, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that in order for a minority to separate itself from the dominant culture, the marginalized must "deterritorialize" their use of language from the language employed by those in power. Deterritorialization, at its core, is the nullification of an already established and accepted idea. Deleuze and Guattari translate this concept into linguistic terms – identifying minor literature as a deterritorialized text that destabilizes the structure of a dominant literary form. They state, "…a minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). A minor literature then, is not one that is inherently different from the language it is trying to subvert, but rather a major language that is de-familiarized and deconstructed to such a point that it becomes unique in and of itself.

While the connection between Hip Hop and Franz Kafka might seem far-

fetched, Deleuze and Guattari's theory of "minor literature" does, in fact, reflect the subversive nature of rap music. African-Americans have, by and large, dealt with incomprehensible amounts of socio-political oppression at the hands of dominant white culture parallel to that of Mittel Europa Jews. However, despite the obvious struggles the black community has faced, music has long been the community's most powerful means of expression. In his book *Shadow and Act*, Ralph Ellison notes the importance of music in the black community. He writes, "For the art - the blues, the spirituals, the jazz, the dance - was what [members of the black community] had in place of freedom" (254-255). Rabaka furthers this argument. He states, "In other words, black folk have long had aesthetic freedom instead of social and political freedom…" Hip Hop, then, is the black community's most recent form of "linguistic wealth," which, for better or worse, takes the place of traditionally valued "monetary," and "cultural" wealth (9).

Hip-Hop, like the work of Kafka, was forged in the midst of overt societal oppression. Black-Americans have, since the days of slavery, been forced to accept the norms of their colonizers. In order to fully understand how and why Hip-Hop has evolved in the way it has, it is necessary to frame its existence in terms of the Black community's reaction to physical colonization and decolonization, and linguistic territorialization and deterritorialization. Hip-Hop, like the earlier Black music forms such as the Negro Spiritual, Blues, and Jazz, sets itself up as a minor musical literature in the sense that it uses certain aspects of the dominant or "major" language but subverts and destabilizes it to the extent that the art form becomes its own unique form of expression. In the words of

Deleuze and Guattari, artists who write in this way produce a type of "…literature that produces an active solidarity… and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (17).

As DJ Kool Herc did when he began to mix a variety of different musical genres together into one unique, cohesive sound, the rappers that followed in his footsteps employed lyrics that used accepted English terminology, but deterritorialized those words to such a degree that they became their own form of societal discourse. In this thesis, I will focus on two distinct sub-genres of Hip-Hop that "forged the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" for members of the black community outside of the constrictive discourses of the dominant white culture in the United States. Gangsta rap, which emerged primarily from the west coast in the late 1980s and was made popular by artists such as N.W.A and 2pac, sought to relieve the frustrations of oppression through outwardly violent and combative imagery. Mirroring the Black Power movement of the 1970s, gangsta rap brought the unfair conditions facing the black community to the forefront of the national consciousness through a language that was very much its own entity. However, despite the use of violent deconstructive language to undermine racism and prejudice, the gangsta movement also aimed the same vitriol at members of the black community itself.

"Conscious" or "positive" rap, which was, in many ways, characterized by its opposition to gangsta rap, began to gain traction as a sub-genre in Hip-Hop on

the East Coast at the same time gangsta rap was making headlines across the country. Like gangsta rap, it embraced the fluidity of language as a means by which to deterritorialize the hegemonic attitudes facing the black community. However, the conscious rappers - epitomized by the Native Tongues Consortium - used these deconstructive attitudes to represent a reality-based art form that shifted away from the hyper-aggressive and violent fantasies used by those on the West Coast. Yet the conscious rappers too undermined their goals of deterritorialization. Despite the call for lyrics that would uplift their community, the rappers all too often fell into gender-normative patriarchal patterns that oppressed black women and black homosexuals.

In this sense, the seemingly opposed sub-genres of Hip Hop find a shared commonality in paradoxes and contradictions. Both movements used language as means by which to free their community from the fetters of linguistic imprisonment, but, in doing so, placed others in lexical chains of their own. They forged their own consciousnesses, but also paved the way for other oppressed groups to respond in kind. As a result, Hip-Hop music can not be defined in a simple, overarching way. It is a mixture of positives, negatives and grey areas.

With that being said, Hip-Hop puts the power of language in the hands of the oppressed, and as a result, gives the black community the ability to express itself outside the realms of societal censorship. The rapper Nas, an artist who straddled the lines between gangsta and positive rap, exclaimed on his album *Illmatic*: “The world is yours.” This simple line strikes to the heart of Hip-Hop’s deterritorializing nature. Whether consciously or not, Nas’s line brings to light the

fact that Hip-Hop is a dissenting voice against society. It highlights, again in the words of Nas, “all the words past the margin[s].” It is the language of the until-now unheard and voiceless. A language that, when at its best, has the ability to regain a form of power that has been absent from the hands of a specific community.

Chapter 1: Gangsta's Paradise

Although Hip Hop culture and rap music has existed in earnest since the mid 1970s, the genre did not hit its stride until the late 1980s when what had been a primarily black art form became part of mainstream culture. Many prominent members of the community argue that the genre is either a symptom of, or even a catalyst for, the explosion of supposedly "regressive" cultural mores. In 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle stated in response to 2Pac's album, "2Pacalypse Now," that "There is absolutely no reason for a record like this to be published. It has no place in our society" (Hughes). In 1995, Presidential candidate Bob Dole passionately argued for the censorship of rap music when he stated: "One of the greatest threats to American family values is the way our popular culture ridicules them. [Rap music] regularly push[es] the limits of decency, bombarding our children with destructive messages of casual violence and even more casual sex" (*The Hip-Hop Wars* 95). The cultural fear of rap music, especially towards the notorious sub-genre known as "gangsta rap," is a well-documented part of Hip-Hop's relationship with the broader cultural dialogues of the United States as a whole. While the comments of Dole and Quayle seem ridiculous to a contemporary reader who has seen rap music become a mainstay of popular American culture, the nature of "gangsta rap" has remained a highly contentious and often times ambiguous issue throughout Hip Hop's history.

Despite the fact that rap music is a genre with a considerable amount of differing opinions and styles, gangsta rap, which is in many ways the loudest and most "in-your-face " subset of the movement, has proved to be the most

recognizable aspect of Hip Hop culture. In his book, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap and the Performance of Masculinity*, journalist Miles White attempts to explain what it means to be a gangsta rapper and why these artists have gained so much popularity. Employing an historical lens, White uses the archetypal definitions of black revolutionaries during the era of slavery:

> The black bad man figure is truly heroic in the classic sense of that term because he seeks the good of those in his community and works toward that even if he is seen by whites as a troublemaker. The bad nigger, on the other hand, exerts his power by resisting all social and moral control, and tends to be viewed as a threat by other blacks since he acts in his own self-interest even if this hurts his community (65).

White's use of the terms "bad black man" and "bad nigger" help characterize the nature of gangsta rap. The loud, aggressive, hyper-masculine rap stylings that emerged primarily from the west coast in the late 1980s glorified the deplorable cultural institutions of misogyny, homophobia, and wanton physical and sexual violence. Rappers such as 2pac, Ice Cube, and Eazy-E eagerly embraced the label of the "bad nigger," effectively perpetuating unfair and harmful negative stereotypes aimed against black men. However, at the same time that gangsta acts reinforced negative cultural conventions, they also pointedly attacked institutions that people in the black community deemed prejudiced and oppressive. In this sense, gangsta rap is a paradox. It is a movement that seems to confirm the erroneous notion that American society should oppress the "dangerous" black

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community, but it also attacks the hegemonic order that has consistently marginalized African Americans.

By far the most influential and infamous act that falls under the gangsta or hardcore rap umbrella is the Compton based Niggas With Attitude, or N.W.A for short, which, according to White, had "the most profound and lasting impact on the direction of hip hop music and its cultural milieu for the remainder of the century and in to the next" (64). N.W.A gained immediate media attention and economic traction with the release of their album, *Straight Outta Compton*, which included tracks such as "Fuck tha Police" and "Gangsta Gangsta." Both tracks, and indeed the album as a whole, exude a volatile combination of aggression and anger. The group's name itself, which transforms the traditionally negative words "Nigga" and "Attitude" into prideful terms, throws convention on its head. If black rappers take ownership of a historically racialized expression, they can control how it's used and transfer its power to themselves—this upends white authority by not allowing whites to continue manipulating the power embedded in the word as a way to repress and marginalize blacks. Even without hearing a single beat or line from one of their songs, N.W.A tells its audience that they are proud of what they represent. They are Niggas with Attitude - "bad niggers" - and they should not, under any circumstances, be challenged.

One of N.W.A's most commercially successful and, to this day, recognizable songs is "Fuck Tha Police". Like the name N.W.A itself, "Fuck Tha Police" is a blunt, aggressive title that immediately brings to mind themes of violence and revolution. In the dominant culture, it is far from socially acceptable

to say “Fuck Tha Police”. The police are supposed to protect innocent citizens. Operating under this dominant, but skewed view of the world, cursing out the police is, in effect, cursing out the very laws that keep society civilized. In a blatant form of dissent, N.W.A shows no fear in asserting that the police are, in fact, just as open to the same criticism as the rest of the White power structure. Even the spelling of “the” which swaps out the “e” for an “a” acts as a subtle form of protest. For instance, although the members of N.W.A were most likely not thinking in terms of French post-structuralist theory when they wrote “Fuck Tha Police,” their re-appropriation of language brings to mind Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of minor literature. Just by changing one letter in the most commonly used article in the English language, N.W.A makes it a point not to participate in the linguistic rules set by the dominant societal structures. In addition, their marginalized voice becomes immediately apparent to the listener. They refuse to acknowledge the police’s authority and do so, in part, by replacing “e” with “a.” Far from trivial, the misspelling of a simple article is part of a conscious effort to strike at the heart of convention and thus invalidate the predominate white culture that N.W.A. seeks to vilify.“Tha” is anything but a misspelled word. N.W.A’s choice speaks to the resistant nature of gangsta rap as a whole. Nothing, not even a three-letter word, is able to force the members of N.W.A to conform.

While N.W.A’s “Fuck Tha Police” has an undeniably controversial title, the lyrics of the song are what sets it apart as a truly “gangsta” track. “Fuck Tha Police” is presented as a court case where the M.Cs of the group act as lawyers

attempting to prosecute members of the police department. At the beginning of the song D.O.C, a member of N.W.A, states: “Right about now, N.W.A. court is in full effect/ Judge Dre presiding/In the case of N.W.A. vs. the Police Department/ Prosecuting attorneys are MC Ren, Ice Cube/ And Eazy-motherfucking-E.” Dr. Dre, the producer and driving creative force behind the group, continues the courtroom theme. He raps: “Order, order, order/ Ice Cube, take the motherfucking stand/Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth/And nothing but the truth so help your black ass?” From the start, it is clear that N.W.A’s courtroom is different from the ones the listener - at least a listener operating under the white power structure - is accustomed to. The witness takes the “motherfucking stand” and swears to tell the whole truth, not on the bible, but rather on his own “black ass.” N.W.A flips the script by placing themselves in a position of authority. “Fuck Tha Police” is a fantasy for the angry, disenfranchised black male. In this sense, the song substantiates Dyson’s argument that rap music functions as a “source of racial identity permitting forms of boasting and asserting machismo for devalued black men suffering from social degradation, allowing commentary on social and personal conditions in uncensored language” (9).

The introduction of “Fuck Tha Police” is a clear form of dissent in terms of subject matter alone, but the true power of the lines is imbedded within the language itself. The words the listener is accustomed to - phrases that are closely associated to the traditionally white dominated judicial system - are modified and changed in a way that subvert the very fabric of the English language. Deleuze

and Guattari saw this modification of the dominant language as one of the defining characteristics of a "minor literature." They write, again in terms of Kafka's role as a Czech Jew who wrote in German, that Kafka used a, "paper language or artificial language" (16). A minority group whose linguistic core is that of its colonizer's *must* be deterritorialized in order for the oppressed to find their own means of expression. So, the fact that "Judge Dre" presides over the courtroom is meaningful in two distinct yet connected ways. The obvious irony is that Dr. Dre, a black rapper from Compton, is now in the same position of power that has oppressed his community, and he uses this station to condemn the unfair practices of the authorities. However, Dre also, in a more figurative sense, presides over the *language* that he deems oppressive. He attaches the word Judge to his rap moniker, qualifies the stand with the word "motherfucking", and replaces the bible with "black ass". In doing so Dre succeeds in creating an "artificial language". He dispatches the meanings of the major language and replaces them with his own, all while using the language he is simultaneously deconstructing. In the rather dramatic words of Deleuze and Guattari, Dre raps "…like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow… finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own patois, his own third-world, his own desert… just as a Czech Jew writes in German , or an Ouzbekian writes in Russian…" (18). Dre and his retinue, at least in the eyes of the dominant culture, are dogs and rats: lesser. But, despite this built in disability, the members of N.W.A create an underground network in which their ideas, and more importantly their language, can stand alone. N.W.A's most infamous song can be heralded as an achievement

of radical political commentary. Although it is an effective example of minor literature it is, as is the case with gangsta rap as a whole, not without its own set of problematic societal constructions.

In order to clarify the many cultural influences that contributes to rap music, it is necessary to briefly touch upon the black movements that preceded the Hip-Hop generation. Rabaka discusses the ideologies that influenced the most historically controversial black movements, specifically the Black Power movement, in order to accurately describe how these ideas shaped Hip-Hop culture. He writes, "Black power was not about hating white people, but about *loving* black people, and defending them against anti-black racist assaults" (99). The Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s was essentially a precursor of hip-hop. Stokley Carmichael, the activist who coined the phrase Black Power, wrote "Black Power means black people coming together to form a political force and either electing representatives or forcing their representatives to speak their needs" (Carmichael). Malcolm X, who became the de-facto face of the Black Power movement, expanded on this definition in a speech he made in 1964. He stated that the goal of the movement was "to fight whoever gets in our way…and bring about the freedom of [people of African descent] by any means necessary" (Malcolm X). The Black Power movement, he would argue, is not about committing random acts of violence against white people, but rather about protecting the black community against the frighteningly real incidents of racism. Gangsta rap, perhaps even more than any other sub genre of Hip Hop, adopts this idea. It seems as though the members of N.W.A simply want to assert their

blackness in a way that brings them the power in society that they deserve. However, unlike the original definition of Black Power, rap music seems to eschew traditional political action and replaces it with highly politicized and often combative language.

Although the radicalism of the Black Power Movement was certainly a key influence on Hip-Hop, the precursors of this era in the fight for Black civil rights can not be forgotten. W.E.B Dubois, one of the founders of the N.A.A.C.P, and Martin Luther King Jr., the pre-eminent figure of the Civil Rights movement, both preached a type of passive resistance that sought to peacefully acclimate blacks into American society instead of distancing them further from the broader community. The fact that Dubois and King sought change was, in and of itself, a radical act. In a speech in 1968, King stated: "[Dr. Dubois] did not content himself with hurling invectives for emotional release and then to retire into smug, passive satisfaction. History had taught him it is not enough for people to be angry-the supreme task is to organize and unite people so that their anger becomes a transforming force" (Martin Luther King Jr). For Dubois and King, resistance was a means to achieve acceptance, while the resistance exhibited by members of the Black Power Movement often begat even more resistance.

The legacy of these differing ideologies shares a place in the evolution of Hip-Hop as a minor literature. As Deleuze and Guattari argued, "…everything in [minor literature] is political" (17). Hip-Hop is defined by the linguistic destruction and re-appropriation of the major language. This re-appropriation puts

language in to the terms of the rapper, and allows the artist to "forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" that is separate from the dominant culture (ibid). In this sense, gangsta rap is not unique in its continuation of the earlier black Civil Rights Movement. Hip-Hop as an entire movement can trace its origins back to the revolutionary messages of figures such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and W.E.B Dubois.

In "Fuck Tha Police", M. C. Ren passionately raps, "For police, I'm saying, 'Fuck you punk!'/Reading my rights and shit, it's all junk/ Pulling out a silly club, so you stand/ With a fake-ass badge and a gun in your hand/ But take off the gun so you can see what's up/ And we'll go at it punk, and I'mma fuck you up!" Here Ren employs a type of black self-defensiveness that the Black Power movement embraced. Ren systematically disagrees with the actions of the police because he views them as members of an oppressive institution. He completes his verse, rhyming "So I'mma turn it around… Smoke any motherfucker that sweats me/ Or any asshole that threatens me…" The implication is that Ren will not sit idly by while his rights are violated.

In short, if somebody threatens him with violence, he will have no problem returning that person's actions in kind. Ren "turns it around" within the narrative of the story he is telling as well as the language he uses. He strips the police officer that is harassing him of his authority both literally in the context of the lyrics as well as linguistically. The "badge," a symbol of power, is rendered "fake" and with it the validity of the police officer's authority. Ren's voice is loud and subversive. He channels Malcolm X's famous, although often times

misinterpreted sentiment, that, as Rabaka summarizes it, "…blacks have a constitutional right to retaliate against anti-black racist violence" (Rabaka 99).

Because N.W.A is a group that straddles the thin line between black self-defense and black-on-black violence, it has been lambasted in the media and government because they pose a threat to primarily white institutions. The government and media react negatively to N.W.A and other gangsta acts because these groups represent an uncensored critique of established cultural values. However, this is exactly the reason why the genre exists. Like the Black Power movement that "admonished blacks to focus their energies and resources on improving their own conditions rather than exhorting whites to allow them to integrate into mainstream America," gangsta rappers refuse to tacitly comply with a society that offers them no chance to achieve power (Rabaka 99). Instead of trying to gain higher ground through methods of assimilation and peace, gangsta rappers embrace the concepts developed by Frantz Fanon. Fanon, an influential black post-colonial scholar, writes: "Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself" (36-37). The concept of "freeing" oneself from the fetters of oppressive institutions is a common thread throughout the gangsta rap canon. It is this process of deconstructing the old, and ultimately re-territorializing a new place in society that defines gangsta rap.

Hip Hop, as a whole, is a movement that can not be analyzed in a vacuum. As Rabaka argues: "African American popular music… is much more than a

soundtrack to black popular culture. It is more akin to a musical map and cultural compass that provides us with a window into black folk's world" (9). It is clear that the Black Power movement of the 1970s had a profound impact on gangsta rap. While Hip Hop is the re-territorialization of culture through *linguistic* and *musical* deconstructionism, the Black Power movement focused more broadly on the need for "psychological liberation and… a protracted process of decolonization and reeducation" (Rabaka 96). Both of these movements, at least in theory, give a voice to the historically silenced black American population. Gangsta rap mirrors the Black Power movement in the sense that both sought to create a black society that could exist outside of the white-constructed social hierarchy. Despite these laudable goals, neither movement has succeeded completely. Hip Hop is still alive and well today, but the plight of the average black citizen has not changed considerably.

2pac, perhaps more than any other gangsta rapper, embraced the Black Power influenced quest for independence from suppressive institutions. In his song, "Panther Power", rapper 2pac Shakur laments his marginalized position in society, rapping, "As real as it seems the American Dream/ Ain't nothing but another calculated schemes/ To get us locked up shot up back in chains/To deny us of the future rob our names…" Immediately, 2pac introduces what he views as the grave injustice American society has committed against the black community. The American Dream, 2pac seems to argue, is an institution that benefits only those who the social structure accepts in its fold. He continues the verse, rapping: "The American Dream wasn't meant for me/ Cause lady liberty is a hypocrite she

lied to me/ Promised me freedom, education, equality/ Never gave me nothing but slavery." 2pac's lyrics are a blatant call for revolution. He renders Lady liberty - traditionally a bastion of hope - as a liar and hypocrite who succeeded only in placing blacks in chains. The next lines represent what 2pac views as the logical conclusion of years of mistreatment. He states, "And now look at how dangerous you made me/ Calling me a mad man cause I'm strong and bold/ With this dump full of knowledge of the lies you told." White culture's fear and mistrust of the American black community is a result of the years of oppression placed on the community, not an inherent quality of a supposedly "lesser" race.

On the surface, 2pac's "Panther Power" and N.W.A's "Fuck Tha Police" seem to have little in common. 2pac's song, while clearly a symptom of his frustration and anger, is a lucid explanation of his views. "Fuck Tha Police", on the other hand, is a song that is characterized almost entirely by anger. How then, one might ask, can these two songs both fall under the category of gangsta rap? Analyzing the last four lines of 2pac's verse makes the similarities more clear. He raps, "So now I'm sitting here mad cause I'm unemployed/ But the government's glad cause they enjoyed/ When my people are down so they can screw us around/Time to change the government now/ Panther power." Both songs, in their own way, call for a change characterized by black unity. 2pac encourages black people to make a change through joining the Black Panther party. He states later in the song: "Don't you ever be ashamed of what you are/ It's ya panther power that makes you a star". Similarly, M.C Ren raps in "100 Miles and Runnin'": "We're not alone…Even if the FBI wants me to shut up/ I've got

10,000 niggas strong/ They got everybody singin' my "Fuck Tha Police" song/And while they treat my group like dirt/ Their whole fuckin' family is wearin' our T-shirts." 2pac and N.W.A employ a powerful "us against them" refrain and do so in a way that strengthens their power against white hegemony.

The voices of gangsta rap gain power when their messages are framed to include the broader, disenfranchised black community. White notes that hardcore rap language, narratives, and styles "resist containment because they speak back in intemperate voices and interrogate the moral authority of those who have constructed and maintained the existence of those socio-economic ghettos which they inhabit" (72). Ironically, the very ghettos that cordon blacks from the rest of society give rise to the genre of gangsta rap. Gangsta rap effectively gives the voiceless an opportunity to speak out against the problems within society through the use of pointed lyrics laid over rhythmic beats.

The framing of "Fuck Tha Police" as well as M.C Ren's verse epitomize the nature of gangsta rap's motivation to undermine the dominant societal discourses of anti-black racism. The aggression and violence aimed against the police, although shocking, seems to be totally justified. In response to the critical reception of *Straight Outta Compton* and an eventual letter from the FBI accusing the members of N.W.A of encouraging a culture of "violence against and disrespect" for police officers, N.W.A member Ice Cube stated: "There is a lot of resentment of police because if you are black you get picked on a lot. They see you in a car or with a beeper and they assume you are a dope dealer. The song is a way to get out aggression. We're not really urging anyone to go out and attack

police"(Hochman). Based on this argument, "Fuck Tha Police" seems to be nothing more than a "commentary on social and personal conditions in uncensored language…" (Dyson 9). However, to completely agree with this definition of rap, particularly gangsta rap, is to ignore the paradoxical nature of the genre.

The problem with gangsta rap then is not the fact that it encourages violence, but the way in which the lyrics are interpreted by the black and white community alike. In the final verse of "Fuck Tha Police", Eazy-E raps: "I'm tired of the motherfucking jacking/Sweating my gang, while I'm chilling in the shack, and/Shining the light in my face, and for what?" By examining this section of the verse, and this section alone, the theory of blacks using violence in the name of self-defense remains intact. These lines are poignant and speak to the nature of institutionalized racism. The police, it seems, are committing violence, or a "motherfucking jacking," against Eazy-E simply because he is black. Eazy-E understandably questions why the color of his skin precipitates unjustified physical confrontations. If E's verse had ended here, it would prove that the backlash against the group is nothing more than an example of the continued suppression of the black identity at the hands of tyrannical societal forces. However, the verse continues, as E angrily exclaims, "Maybe it's because I kick so much butt/ I kick ass -- or maybe cause I blast/ On a stupid-ass nigga when I'm playing with the trigger/ Of an Uzi or an AK…" Ironically, Eazy-E gives a good reason for the police to harass him. While a self-defensive brand of violence is justified by the members of the group, E readily admits that he is a dangerous man

- “the E with the criminal behavior” - effectively validating law enforcement’s aggressive behavior.

Eazy-E’s verse introduces one of the most troubling aspects of gangsta rap. While N.W.A’s attack on white institutions, if not completely justified, is understandable, the group’s acceptance of black on black violence is less digestible. Eazy - E is proud to “take out a cop”, but he seems equally as pleased to “blast on a stupid-ass nigga.” It is one thing to challenge historically oppressive white institutions with violence, but it is an entirely different thing to aim violence towards the very community the song seems to be defending. Tricia Rose concisely sums up this attitude when she states, “There is no question that commercial, mainstream, American Hip Hop not only responds to a legacy of violence against black people, but it also exacerbates and glorifies it” (*“Commercial Hip-Hop Glorifies Violence Against Black People”*). The glorification of black-on-black violence does not seem to be on the mind of people like Bob Dole and Dan Quayle who scold rap. Rose explores this idea further in her book, *Black Noise*. She explains that Hip Hop, often times through the use of threatening language, has the ability to incite fear amongst white dominated institutions (such as the White House and the FBI) because it calls in to question the validity of the hegemonic order. After all, the FBI did not scrutinize N.W.A because Eazy-E boasted about killing another *black* person, but rather because he aimed aggressive language towards the institution of law enforcement. Rose writes, “Rappers have re-articulated a long-standing awareness

among African Americans that crimes against blacks (especially black-on-black crimes), do not carry equal moral weight or political imperative" (136).

While gangsta rap has, to an extent, succeeded in "interrogat[ing] the moral authority," the sub-genre has also perpetuated negative black attitudes within the black community itself. It both contests *and* serves the colonial power. The fact that those in power within dominant society find gangsta rap disturbing is not surprising. It is an intentionally subversive genre that, at its best, can question authority in a provocative manner. Unfortunately, this mode of disruptive speech does not define gangsta rap in its entirety. For all of the anger aimed at the hegemony, gangsta rap targets members of its own community with equal amounts of vitriol. As a result, the concept of power in numbers that artists like 2pac and N.W.A champion consistently undermines itself.

In the 1980's when Hip Hop began to emerge as an increasingly popular black musical genre, the same streets that saw the rise of the most successful artists were simultaneously inundated with a spike in crime, gang activity, and drug use. Hip Hop, a genre founded out of oppression, was also greatly influenced by the crack and gang epidemic of the inner cities. Myles White writes, "Whether young black males in these areas were dealing drugs, involved in gangs, or just innocent bystanders, mistrust and the adoption of hardness as a mask and a kind of street attitude became daily armor in a culture where they learned to view each other warily" (79). The "hood armor" of gangsta rappers is often expressed through a type of hyper-masculinity and bravado. White writes, "Representations of urban black males in recorded music… began to reformulate around notions of

hardness and hard masculinity as defined by urban street culture" (79). In the sub-genre of gangsta rap, credibility is intimately tied to a hyper-masculine identity. The more cops shot, gang members fought, and bitches fucked, the better.

The paradoxical relationship between black self defense and black-on-black violence is one of the most troubling results of Hip Hop's emphasis on hyper-masculinity. Gangsta rappers are generally defined by their "hardness" towards those in power as well as those in their own community. The music and legacy of 2pac and N.W.A serve as powerful examples of this phenomenon. Jeff Weiss describes 2pac's complexity as both criminal and poet. He writes, "[2pac] is a rap wedge issue, the archetypal sensitive thug, an intellectual who wanted peace and violence and always fell victim to damned blunted paranoia. He could be everything or nothing - whatever angle you wanted to approach him from" (16). 2pac was a man who could release a song like "Panther Power", which called for the unification of black people in order to fight back against patently unfair societal mores, but he was also capable of producing songs like "Hit em Up" which attacked his rival Biggie Smalls.

The glorification of violence in gangsta rap, in the words of White, can be seen as a way to "resist the historical policing and containment of black male bodies" (79). However, this definition is problematic when black males effectively contain other black males through their language. 2pac raps in "Hit em Up": Cut your young ass up, leave you in pieces/ Now be deceased… You better back the fuck up/ Before you get smacked the fuck up…All of y'all mother fuckers, fuck you, die slow, motherfucker/ My .44 make sure all y'all kids don't

grow." These lines, unlike the violent ones in "Panther Power," are directed towards the Notorious B.I.G, another black rapper. The natural question to ask then, is how can an artist who writes in a minor language attack a different artist who shares the same re-territorializing goal?

"Hardness," in the sense that it is a hyper-masculine response to oppression, is an effective means of protest when it is aimed at those who inhabit the role of the oppressor. However, when this bombastic style of art is used against others facing the same sort of oppression, the effectiveness is muddled. In fact, when 2pac embraces his "thug" personality and uses it to attack other members of the black community, he is reinforcing the negative stereotypes that social order has perpetuated. In *The Hip Hop Wars*, Rose argues that the rise of thug and gangsta rap is actually the *result* of white hegemony. Whites, who make up a growing proportion of Hip Hop's listening base, *expect* blacks to be thugs: "Mainstream white consumers drive hyper-demand for these images… This in turn encourages black youth, who are also raised on images of black thugs as a primary source of power, to tailor their image to suit market needs" (102).

To view gangsta rap as *either* a self-perpetuating genre that contributes to even more oppression *or* a combative language used solely against racist institutions is to diminish its artistic complexity. Jason Whitlock wrote, "We [as black people] have allowed our youth to buy into a culture… [that is] anti-black, anti-education, pro-drug dealing and violent" (Whitlock 2). The lines that promote these ideas are too often taken "as proof of black urban underclass dysfunction" (Rose 76). It is hard to argue that a line like "My .44 make sure all

y'all kids don't grow" promotes black prosperity. However, it is equally difficult to argue that a line like "lady liberty is a hypocrite she lied to me/ Promised me freedom, education, equality/ Never gave me nothing but slavery," represents a type of music that devalues the worth of the black community. Gangsta rap represents cross-section between dominant white attitudes and revolutionary black attitudes. It is at once overtly critical of American culture and simultaneously a disturbing function of prejudice. In essence, gangsta rap is *both* a positive *and* negative representation of the black community and *both* participates in *and* deconstructs white hegemony.

Chapter 2: The Paradox of Positivity

The explosion of gangsta rap on the West Coast occurred at the same time the Native Tongues movement, which included acts such as De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, and the Jungle Brothers, began to gain traction on the East Coast. Whereas the rappers in L.A were exclaiming "Fuck tha Police", the East Coast, in the words of A Tribe Called Quest member Phife Dawg, had, "a slew of rappers pushing positivity." However, despite these competing styles - violence versus positivity - the members of the Native Tongues movement, like the gangstas, were equally discontented with the social conditions of the black community and used the deterritorialization of language too challenge dominant power structures.

The rise of Afrocentrism, pioneered by Professor Molefi Kete Asante in the 1980s, explicitly stated the black community's need for an identity that separated itself from the discourses of the white hegemonic order. Asante wrote, "…When black people view themselves as centered and central in their own history then they see themselves as agents, actors, and participants rather than as marginals on the periphery of political or economic experience" (Asante). In keeping with Asante's basic definition of Afrocentrism, both the gangsta rappers of the west coast and the "positive" rappers stationed primarily on the east coast

pushed for a black identity that could be defined outside of the pressures of white society. However, the means by which these two groups chose to express this idea were drastically different and often times at odds with one another. The distinction between these ideologies can be traced back to White's definitions of the "bad nigger and the "bad black man." As I argued earlier, the "bad nigger" is concerned primarily with his own ability to achieve power, which was the predominant ethos of the West Coast gangsta rap contingent. The "bad nigger" is a man who is willing to take advantage of or hurt *any* member of the community - black or white - in his quest towards his own social mobility. On the other hand, the "bad black man," a figure more closely related to rap's positivity movement, is "truly heroic in the classic sense of that term because he seeks the good of those in his community and works toward that even if he is seen by whites as a troublemaker" (White 65). Positive or Conscious rap can also be defined as "reality rap." It is a sub-genre that focuses on the struggles of ordinary people and uses lyrics that are meant to, in some way, alleviate those struggles. The members of the Native Tongues Movement used Afrocentrism in a way that subverted unfair societal constructions, but used language that was more peaceful and progressive than their peers on the west coast.

The defining and most commercially successful group to fall under the socially progressive umbrella was a Tribe Called Quest. The group, which consisted of Q-Tip, Phife Dawg, and Ali Shaheed Muhammed, represented a different means by which to de-territorialize language. While the gangsta rappers on the West Coast employed their own brand of Afrocentricsm - as seen in the

courtroom scene in N.W.A's "Fuck Tha Police - the Native Tongues' brand was decidedly less combative in nature. Even the groups' musical samplings were indicative of the two factions' differing ideologies. Whereas the West Coast gangstas used an array of pounding synthesized sounds, the East Coast "positive" rappers relied on smoother, less abrasive jazz samples. In the most basic sense, groups like A Tribe Called Quest and N.W.A were doing the same thing. They both wrote songs that questioned the authorities and overlaid their powerful lyrics with a variety of musical samplings. However, in reality, the differences between these two styles is significant. The language of these groups - the combination of the musical samplings and lyrics - both deterritorialize the *dominant* language, but do so in a distinctly positive and combative manner respectively.

The most obvious indication of the gap between the West Coast gangsters and the East Coast progressives are the lyrics that explicitly poke fun at either group. The most overt example of this is the parodic Black Sheep song, "U mean I'm Not?" From the start, the song seems wholly uncharacteristic of the Native Tongues Movement's reliance on smoothness and positivity. The sample, much like the ones Dr. Dre used throughout his career, is loud, bass heavy and generally biting. The song begins with a man screaming, "Yo motherfucker/ What the fuck you lookin at?/ Yo, get out my motherfuckin face right now!". The same man continues this frightening diatribe, exclaiming, "Yo man, trip this/ I was out on the ave man/This nigga lookin at me wrong/ So I pulled out my motherfuckin nine/ And I smoked his ass!". These lyrics are clearly over the top and are eerily similar to the lines consistently employed by groups like N.W.A, but pushed just

far enough into the realm of absurdity that the listener understands the song is meant to be taken a joke.

"U Mean I'm Not?" takes the volatility of gangsta rap and pushes it to its extreme. By the time the song was released in 1991, gangsta rap had proved to be the most economically profitable sub-genre of Hip-Hop and as a result had come to unfairly define the genre as a whole. The song describes the day in the life of Black Sheep's core lyricist, Dres. Dres continues the theme of wanton violence throughout the narrative. He raps, "Went to the bathroom, and beat the rush/Yo, who the fuck used my toothbrush?". Immediately, Dres cues the listener into the ensuing absurdity exhibited in the rest of the song. In the same way that the members of N.W.A deterritorialzed the language of the courtroom to put the normal power structures in terms of their own linguistic control, Dres takes the stereotypical aggressiveness of the gangsta rap trend itself and highlights its sheer ridiculousness. He deterritorializes a language that was meant to deterritorialize the dominant language in the first place. He applies the same combative language seen in the gangsta canon to something as trivial as someone using his toothbrush. He continues, "Went to my sister's room, yo bitch, wake up/ You stupid ass, dirty ass, nasty ass slut/Shot her in the leg, shot her in the thigh/ Kicked her in the pussy and punched her in the eye…Don't fuck with mine bitch, word is bond…" Dres effectively uses the aggression he sees as an inherent quality of gangsta rap and applies it to a situation that what would normally be nothing more than a standard sibling disagreement.

Dres's clever mixture of banality and hyper-aggression provides a comedic but nevertheless powerful insight into what the positive Hip-Hoppers of the 1980s and early 90s saw as the fundamental issues that plagued the industry and culture alike. The very fact that Dres is willing to take a comedic stance in a song is an indication of the differences in form between positivity and gangsta rap. The rest of the song continues to provide snippets into Dres's life. After his mother burns the egg yolk she has prepared for him, he delivers a "Knee to the pussy, kick to the skull/ AK yall, shot the bitch in the temple". When Dres' father voices his frustration with his son's behavior, Dres chooses to simply "[Shoot] him in the dick." In perhaps the most pointed line of the song, Dres ends his fantasy when he raps, "Ate my food, found my coat/ Mailman came so I cut his motherfuckin' throat/ Waitin' for the motherfuckin' school bus!" In this culminating line, Dres succeeds in completely mixing a reality with which many listeners are able to identify with, and qualifies it with brutality and violence. This cognitive dissonance reveals the ultimate point of the song. For most members of the black community, the gangsta experience was not the norm. To paint life in that way, Dres seems to posit, would be disingenuous and ultimately detrimental to the goal of deconstructing unfair stereotypes.

In the final verse of the song, it is revealed that Dres has dreamed the entire sequence of events. He is woken up by his friends and when they ask what is wrong he responds, "I dreamed that I was hard…" The importance of this dream sequence is two-fold. Obviously, "U Mean I'm Not" lambasts and deconstructs the gangsta style by taking recognizable themes and pushing them to

the extreme. But, more importantly, the song sets the tone for the rest of the Black Sheep's album as well as the message the group's compatriots in the Native Tongues Movement chose to explore. To these progressive rappers, the violent fantasies propagated in the most popular sub-genre of the era were nothing more than dreams and, as a result, lack a sense of authenticity in describing the black community's everyday experience. In this sense, the differences between the gangsta and positive rappers, at least in the conception of the latter groups, can also be seen as the differences between ineffectual fantasies and more substantive realities.s.

In the words of Fanon, the act of deterritorializing the dominant culture's language and replacing it with a unique set of linguistic structures is "directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates [the black community]…" (210). Although the genre of Hip-Hop is, in its totality, defined by some kind of linguistic destruction of the white hegemonic order, the idea of rehabilitating and reclaiming a black culture in a distinctly *positive*, or Afro-centric manner, is an idea that does not apply to all sub-genres of Hip-Hop. As shown through the Black Sheep's, "U Mean I'm Not?" the different styles in Hip-Hop clashed on the most effective ways to implement this change. This mix of positivity and reality, which coincides with Asante and Fanon's theories alike, is the defining characteristic of the Native Tongues Movement.

In A Tribe Called Quest's song, "We Can Get Down" off of their album titled, *Midnight Marauders*, the two rappers in the group, Phife Dawg and Q-Tip, explicitly state their philosophies on Hip-Hop. This self-referential song serves to drive home the point that violence in Hip-Hop is a counter-productive and ultimately fruitless means by which to become "agents, actors, and participants" within the black community. Phife Dawg raps, "My man where ya going, you can't escape/ When the Tribe is in the house that means nobody is safe…" At first glance, these lines, like those employed by the gangstas, seem to be glorifying violence. Phife Dawg's threatening assertion that when the members of A Tribe Called Quest are present nobody is safe sounds problematically similar to lines from N.W.A like "I'm "The motherfucking villain that's mad/ With potential, to get bad as fuck." However, the difference relies on the group's use of metaphor.

Even A Tribe Called Quest's album title, *Midnight Marauders,* invokes the theme of violence. The word "maraud" brings to mind images of thievery, piracy and a general lack of empathy for others. The members of A Tribe Called Quest, in accordance with their own brand of deterritorialization, manage to turn violent terms into peaceful ones. In a snippet from the end of the song, "Award Tour," a robotic voice, speaking for the group as a whole, states, "The word maraud means to loot. In this case, we maraud for ears." In this sense, the members of A Tribe Called Quest deconstruct a negative term, and reconstruct it in a positive way. The theme of deterritorializing the violence exhibited in so many rap songs of the era is consistent throughout much of A Tribe Called Quest's oeuvre. Like the deconstruction of the album title itself, Phife Dawg

qualifies his statement that nobody is safe when the group is on the mic. He continues in "We Can Get Down, "We rap about what we see, meaning reality/From people busting caps and like Mandela being free/ Not every MC be with the negativity." With the addition of this line, it becomes clear to the listener that the combative imagery that Phife employs is not aimed at hurting others but, in fact, a way to reveal the violence that plagues the black community. His reference to the violence experienced by many blacks in the inner city, as well as the violent struggle experienced by Nelson Mandela in his quest to end Apartheid in South Africa are the sad, destructive realities that surround Phife's everyday life. As a result, Phife eschews the use of more negativity and instead decides to "push positivity."

Phife Dawg consciously chooses to embrace the harsh realities facing the black community. As Professor Marvin Gladney argues, "Phife, in his lyrics calls for a move away from music dedicated to escapism and avoidance of daily realities" (293). Unlike the violent, greedy, and sexual fantasies that are often associated with Hip-Hop, the members of A Tribe Called Quest produced more authentic musical stylings. This brand of hip-hop, Gladney continues, "provides a distinct and conscious connection between artistic expression and the frustration of Black people existing here in America and, indeed in the world…"(293).

Although the members of A Tribe Called Quest, The Black Sheep, De La Soul and The Jungle Brothers did not write songs about killing cops or selling drugs, they were certainly not afraid to question and attack unbalanced societal structures. Of the countless examples of this type of criticism within the Native

Tongues' canon[2], the Black Sheep's "Black With N.V," especially in relation to their blatantly parodic "U Mean I'm Not," is arguably the most effective at relaying these messages. The conscious rappers, as epitomized by the Native Tongues Movement, although deliberately critical of the gangsta rap movement, employed many of the same poetic tactics as their more combative peers to achieve a sense of solidarity within their own community. In this sense, the two seemingly opposing styles share certain commonalities. In "Black With N.V," rapper Dres plays with the fluidity of language in order to achieve the goal of deterritorialization. In the first verse he raps, "My people, from nigger to negro to man of color/ Killed my father and my brother so that you could rape my mother/ Now you wonder, why is it through instinct you fear/ Wouldn't dare me to stare, one for yourself, you're out of here." These passionate lines immediately clue the listener into the fact that Dres, speaking for the black community, is justified in his anger and frustrations with the dominant culture. Despite the evolution of the black community within American cultural discourse - "from nigger to negro to man of color" - Dres seems to be arguing that not much has changed. Although the murder and rape experienced by the black community invokes the days of slavery and the nadir of the Civil Rights movement, it is clear that the scars of oppression have not disappeared from the black community's collective consciousness. Furthermore, while physical violence by and against blacks had dissipated over the years, the consequence - namely the white fears of retribution

[2] See De La Soul's *Buhloone Mindstate*, The Jungle Brother's *Straifght out the Jungle* and A Tribe Called Quest's *The Low End Theory*

from African-Americans - has remained as an undercurrent of black-white relations within the United States.

Dres explores the idea that the black community is instinctually feared throughout the rest of "Black With N.V". The line, "Killed my father and my brother so you could rape my brother…" is similar to Ice Cube's volatile statement "Fuck Tha Police" in the sense that they both recognize the ability of their language to frighten members of the dominant society. However, the two songs diverge considerably in terms of how they use this power. Whereas the threatening refrain is constant throughout the gangsta language, Dres takes a different approach. He raps, "Not to worry, to harm you not intention of my creed," adding, "But to stop your greed and give me what I need/ Opportunity, for a life for me/ And generations to come with in tranquility…" Although the members of the conscious groups like the Black Sheep and gangsta rappers like N.W.A fall under the broad umbrella of Hip-Hop, the respective aims of each group is clearly different. That is not to say, however, that the Black Sheep's lyrics do not fit into Deleuze and Guattari's theory of minor literature. They write: "…[minor literature's] cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics" (17). The lines in the first verse of "Black With N.V" are politically charged, but in a peaceful, life affirming manner. The members of Black Sheep do not want to use violence and aggression to achieve their goals, but that does not mean they are comfortable with complacency in society.

In the beginning of the second verse of "Black With N.V", Dres raps, "As a player of the game, of the lifetime game I'm playing/ I bet you're nodding, shake

your head to what I'm saying/It's keep then but those of men color of skin could even begin to wonder/What is it to ponder to let another bother." Dres explicitly tells his audience, without prejudice towards the white community, that the privilege of being white allows members of the dominant community a sense of security that is not offered to the black community. The black community, for better or for worse, is lower than whites in terms of the social hierarchy of the United States. However, despite institutional inequalities, Dres argues, it is also up to the black community to raise each other up asking his audience, to "stay open not dismissing," because, "lack of vision makes division product no ambition…" Dres' message is simple: if the black community can band together in a positive, productive manner, as they did under Martin Luther King Jr's leadership, the people will thrive.

Dres hits his lyrical stride later on in the second verse. He toys with the fluidity of the words "wish" and "wash" in order to highlight the plight of many members of the black community. He begins, "wishes which you wish upon you wish were more than wishes." Wishes seem to be unobtainable. The "collective enunciation" of the statement applies this idea to all members of the oppressed black community. Despite the inequalities that Dres faces, he believes his ability to rap and record music gives him the ability to not only express himself, but to also achieve a type of economic success that is usually not allotted for his people. He expresses this idea when he raps, "If I wish not to record steady now then I wash dishes." Without his *musical* opportunity, Dres argues, his opportunities in *life* would be severely limited. In the rest of the section, he effectively becomes a

spokesperson for those who lack a voice that could help them achieve upward mobility in the social structure. In this way, he embodies the idea the argument that the work of an artist on the margins necessarily, "…constitutes a common action…" (17). The transition from individual to collective becomes evident in the next line when Dres raps, "Wish while I wash, the water hot gets colder/ Black I'm saying that in fact the dish gets clean and I get older." He is no longer just Dres, the successful member of the Black Sheep, but also an average black man trapped in a stagnant, unfulfilling job. It is no accident that Dres chooses to address "black" instead of "you" or a particular individual. "Black With N.V" is both implicitly and explicitly a commentary that speaks for the *entire* black community.

Initially, Dres' sentiment seems relatively straightforward. Like in most rap songs, "Black With N.V" chronicles the struggle of the black community, in this case shown through the lens of a person employed as a dishwasher. However, Dres's repeated use of the words "wish" and "wash" makes the song a perfect example of minor literature's ability to deterritorialize language. Dres continues, "Because seemingly so, the dishes will grow to dishes far beyond me/Lost my wish and broke a dish so now I'm wishy-washy." In these lines, wish and wash take on multiple meanings. Dres wishes to escape from the monotony of washing dishes, but his wish is lost and as a result he becomes "wishy-washy." The phrase "wishy-washy" is multifaceted as well, as it highlights the fact that Dres is still forced to wash dishes, and, more importantly, the fact that that reality renders him impotent and ineffective. Dres has a remarkable ability to bend the accepted

definitions of language. Within this line of thinking, the lyric, "Wishes which you wish upon which for more you wishes" becomes all the more powerful. The repeated use of the "whi" sound confuses the listener to such an extent that the entire phrase moves away from the expected and accepted use of language. Wish and wash become terms that are undefinable and, as a result, become words that, "moves head over heels and away" from the dominant structures of language (Deleuze 26). In effect, the words "wish" and "wash" become "wishy-washy" in and of themselves.

"Black with N.V" is a song that can "take flight on creative lines of escape" from the dominant language and gives the author, and the community the author stands for, the ability to subvert a dominant, oppressive society as a whole. This type of language, "escapes from informational myth in order to evaluate the hierarchic and imperative system of language as a transmission of orders, an exercise of power or of resistance to this exercise" (Deleuze 23). Within this dense, jargon filled definition is the core principle of Hip-Hop as a minor-language. In Dres' own words, rap allows "[me to] Understand [my] foundation" and "create my own creation."

The concept of creating one's own definitions for words and phrases that have been used in a derogatory manner against the black community is a common theme throughout all sub-genres of hip-hop, but it is especially pronounced within conscious rap. In this sense, A Tribe Called Quest's "Sucka Nigga" is one of the best examples of a rap song that manages to deterritorialize and eventually reterritorialize the most damaging and incendiary words used against African-

Americans. Q-Tip, the de-facto leader of A Tribe Called Quest, introduces his general musical philosophy to his audience. He raps: "Socially I'm not inane, black and white got game/ If you came to the jam, well I'm glad you came". Q-Tip lets his audience know that he does not discriminate. If people have talent, or in his words, "game", he will respect them no matter what their skin color is. Despite this assertion, Q-Tip is not naive enough to argue that the black community has not faced systematic oppression at the hands of the white community.

In "Sucka Nigga," Q-Tip provides a brief, but nevertheless powerful history of the derogatory term nigger. He states, "See, nigga first was used back in the Deep South/ Falling out between the dome of the white man's mouth/ It means that we will never grow, you know the word dummy/ niggas in the community think its crummy…" Q-Tip's sentiment is clear: the word "nigger" was, for many years, used to oppress black people. This idea is neither particularly revolutionary nor controversial, but Q-Tip complicates the issue when he continues: "But I don't, neither does the youth cause we em-/Brace adversity it goes right with the race/ And being that we use it as a term of endearment/Niggas start to bug, to the dome is where the fear went…" "Nigger", a word that was once one of the despicable things you could call a black person, is all of the sudden turned into a "term of endearment" that "the little shorties say all of time." As I have argued in my essay, "Hip-Hop and Minor Literature: The Deconstruction and Reterritorialization of Black Identity," Q-Tip seeks to move past the constrictive and contemptuous implications of the word, making the use of

"nigga" a way to subvert the power of the major language. Much like N.W.A's "Fuck Tha Police", although admittedly with a more racially charged tone, the deletion of the "er" in favor of the "a" at the end of the word nigger brings the word into the black community's ownership, effectively "mak[ing] use of the polylingualism of one's own language…to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality…" (27). The simple substitution of a letter manages to create a powerful statement: the members of a Tribe Called Quest, and indeed black youth as a whole, are niggas and they are proud of it. A Tribe Called Quest takes arguably the most oppressive term that can be used against a black person and changes it into a positive one and does so without the use of violent language.

The members of the Native Tongues movement make a concerted effort to stay "real" and true to their everyday experiences. In "Black With N.V," Dres highlights the unfair working conditions that his people face. In "Sucka Nigga," Q-Tip explores his relationship with language. In general, the conscious rappers avoid fantasies and bravado unless it is a blatant parody of other societal structures. However, like the gangsta contingent, the Native Tongues produced their fair share of troublesome songs. Homophobia and misogyny, although arguably less pronounced than in other sub-genres of Hip-Hop, are certainly evident in conscious rap.

In Anders Stephanson's "Interview with Cornel West," West states, "the pressure on Afro-Americans as a people has forced the black man closer to the black woman: they are in the same boat. But they are also at each other's throat.

The relation is internally hierarchical and often mediated by violence: black men over black women" (285). Despite conscious rappers' relatively progressive attitudes towards race, in so far as they find power in their identities outside of the dominant attitudes, they, like gangsta rappers, are not exempt from the "internally hierarchal" structure between men and women nor are they particularly conscious or sympathetic towards the issues facing the queer community. They replicate the same type of oppression that their music fights to subvert.

Although groups such as N.W.A and others that could be considered "gangsta" were by far the worst offenders in terms of homophobia and misogyny, the Native Tongues - despite "pushing positivity" - were far from accepting of women or gays. Perhaps the most infamous example of homophobia exhibited by the so-called positive rappers is A Tribe Called Quest's unreleased song, "Georgie Porgie." The song, for good reasons, was blacklisted by Jive Records. The song begins with one of the most tired and commonly used homophobic tropes. Phife Dawg rhymes: "In the beginning there was Adam and Eve/ But some try to make it look like Adam and Steve…" Immediately, it is clear that the positivity the group usually embraces is replaced by uninformed hatred and homophobia. The racism experienced by the rappers mirrors the homophobia the rappers exhibit in their music. Phife continues, "I couldn't believe when I found out he was funny…/ I couldn't hack it, I knew this brother for years/ But on the DL, getting done up the butt box/ Oh my God how gross can one be/ Well anyway, better him than me…" Phife Dawg's words are, to put it mildly, offensive and ironically replicate the kind of language used by the dominant culture against black people. To him,

members of the gay community are "funny" and "gross." The song seeks to push the black gay community down in relation to the supposedly stronger and more masculine straight community. For example, Phife uses the phrase, "Getting done up the butt box" in order to replace the more acceptable phrase of anal sex and highlights his belief that homosexual activities are inherently lesser and somehow disgusting.

In effect, the song "Georgie Porgie" does the same thing that members of the Native Tongues Crew, and indeed all rappers, strive against. From their already marginalized position in society, the members of A Tribe Called Quest aim their barbs at another subset of belittled people. In *The Hip Hop Wars*, Tricia Rose examines this troubling phenomenon. She writes, "Hip Hop reflects the important role that homophobia plays in defining masculinity… Men insulted for being too weak are often called faggots… [Gay people] are designated as weak and subordinate…" (237). In the same way that N.W.A's use of hyper-violent language undermined their supposed goal of simply voicing their frustration, A Tribe Called Quest's use of homophobic slurs undermines their goal of realism and positivity.

The song "Georgie Porgie" was, thankfully, scrapped from *The Low End Theory*. As a result, the members of the group used the same samples and same guest artists to create the song "Show Business." "Show Business" is one of the group's most aggressive and powerful tracks. It explicitly attacks the music industry as a "cesspool" controlled by "snakes" and "fakes." The overwhelming irony of the song is that it was a direct response to the censorship of "Georgie

Porgie." While censorship in Hip-Hop is certainly an important issue in so far as it is another part of the marginalization the genre consistently seeks to overcome, it is hard to reconcile this idea with the fact that the song that was censored was *itself* a form of abuse against a different group. With this in mind, lyrics from "Show Business" such as, "It's the rap industry and it ain't that cool/ Only if you're on stage or if you're speaking to your people/Ain't no-one your equal/ Especially on the industry side…" take on a decidedly paradoxical meaning. Q-Tip might indeed be right in his assertion that the white heads of the music industry take advantage of black artists, but that idea coupled with the fact that these lyrics are in no small part connected to his homophobic attitudes renders even his most powerful and positive lyrics exceedingly problematic.

Although there are certainly examples of homophobia, on the whole it plays a relatively minor role in the oeuvre of conscious rap, at least compared to other sub-genres of Hip-Hop. The theme of misogyny, on the other hand, is more pronounced. In terms of gender, the conscious rappers stay in comfortable, dominant cultural territory and in many cases, even extend these troubling attitudes. As is the case with homophobia, misogynistic attitudes are nothing new within the black community, or in western culture in general. Rabaka explores the idea of specifically Black patriarchal attitudes in Hip-Hop through the attitudes inherited by Hip-Hop artists from the Black Power movement, arguing, "white males' domination of politics and economics emasculated black men;" and, hearkening back to slavery, "white males' legal and illegal prevention of black men from being the protectors of black women and children was yet another way

in which black men were emasculated." Rabaka maintains that the quest for *patriarchal* power was the key impetus for the rise of the Black Power movement. He argues that the proponents of these ideas exhibited "a small-minded reaction against the fact that they had not been allowed to share in the spoils of patriarchal capitalism because of white supremacy and anti-black racism" (113). Rabaka's summary of Hip-Hop's inheritance of misogynistic attitudes, while perhaps over-simplified, sheds light on the hints of anti-feminist thought within the realm of conscious rap.

A valuable example of this paradoxical nature between marginalization and marginalized is the analysis of the Black Sheep's album *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*. I have already argued that the song "Black With N.V" succeeds in highlighting and deconstructing the lopsided power structure in the United States. However, some of the more popular songs on the album flippantly employ misogynistic messages. Although the album begins with "U Mean I'm Not," which in some way satirizes gangsta rap's militant brand of misogyny, the Black Sheep disguise their inclination towards anti-feminism with humor. In a skit entitled "LASM," which stands for "Ladies Against Sexist Motherfuckers," the members of the Black Sheep seem to anticipate and poke fun at their attitudes towards the other sex. One of the interviewers asks, "In your album you disrespect women by calling us hoes. Why is that?" Mister Lawnge responds, "Honey, ho is merely short for honey. Dig? Ho is short for honey. We just got lazy and dropped the -ney." Although Mister Lawnge's interpretation of the etymology is, in fact, correct, hoe - then and now - is synonymous with whore.

Throughout the mock interview, the members of the Black Sheep are entirely dismissive of the very real issues the female interviewer brings up. After the "hoe" exchange, Mister Lawnge mutters under his breath, "Right. Like when you drop to you knees. Right, right," referring to the word "dropped" in the previous statement. In doing so, Mister Lawnge undoes the already rather weak explanation he gives to the interviewer and further alienates his female audience. When the interviewer rightfully calls the members of the Black Sheep out on their blatant misogyny, she is literally laughed at. She angrily states, "Hold up, hold up. All professionalism aside, motherfucker, where do you come off thinking you're God's gift to the world? It is dogs like you that make men look so bad." The giggles that follow highlight the Black Sheep's general attitude towards women: they are sexual objects whose objections to misogyny are something to be mocked and ridiculed.

In his verse in the song "Pass the 40," Mister Lawnge, whose moniker reflects his allegedly 9.5 inch penis, raps about how his unusually large member is able to give "hoes… a free hysterectomy." He continues, rapping: "I do damage, Oh, Uhm/ The Sugar Dick is guaranteed to make you cum." Rose's conception of this trend mirrors the ideas presented by Rabaka. She states, "tales of sexual domination falsely relieve [black men's] lack of self-worth and limited access to economic and social markers for heterosexual male power" (*Black Noise* 15). Admittedly, the Black Sheep are arguably the most overtly misogynistic group in the Native Tongues Posse; however, the fact that the so-called "positive" consortium of rappers would tolerate this type of message undermines their

supposed goals of uplifting the black population as a whole and not just black males.

Contradictions play a part in most art, but they are not necessarily easy to swallow. The hints that the members of the Black Sheep, the Native Tongues Posse, and eventually the descendants of the conscious movement, reveal towards anti-misogynistic behavior are almost always qualified and incomplete. In "Strobelite Honey," Dres tells the object of his affection that her "mind is brighter than [her] booty." In "Ms. Fat Booty," Mos Def raps about his true love for the woman he refers to only as "Ms. Fat Booty," but also lambasts her for "fucking [him] up mentally." In "I Am I Be," rapper Trugoy states, "I've always walked the right side of the road… I've never played a sister by touching where her private parts reside," but in "Buddy" he raps, "Positions, muscles flexed/ Dove was lost in a gon-a-hex/Passed her test, felt her teddy/Jennifer, oh Jenny."

With these contradictions towards women in mind, the positivity and consciousness exhibited by these artists are thrown into question. Is it possible to be a truly "positive" influence on the black community when these artists' songs marginalize more than half of their community? In seeking their own deterritorialization from the white hegemonic order, these artists effectively reinforce a patriarchal and homophobic sensibility that bears its likeness to the oppression they strive to overthrow. Tricia Rose writes, "The overlapping beliefs among so many [artists and] stakeholders [in Hip-Hop] make it exceptionally difficult to get these issues on the table… thus contribut[ing] to the gridlock in which hip hop finds itself…" (*The Hip Hop Wars* 240) This gridlock - the idea

that even the most progressive rappers seem to adopt misogynistic attitudes - undermines the true power of Hip-Hop. At its best, Hip Hop is an effective tool for the deterritorialization and subversion of iniquitous cultural institutions. It is a revolutionary language that brings the marginalized together under a common goal and questions authority. At its worst, the genre reinforces this same injustices and merely changes the target of oppression. With that in mind, Hip Hop remains an exceedingly powerful example of minor literature that has the ability to change societal dialogues. The way that power is yielded is the key to unlocking the positive potential of the genre.

Chapter 3: The Post Hip-Hop Generation

Throughout this study, I have only touched on two specific sub-genres of Hip-Hop that were both prominent during the late 1980s and early 90s in the United States. Even though both gangsta and conscious rap encapsulate two of the most distinct sub-genres of Hip-Hop, they are far from being complete indicators of the movement as a whole. As Hip-Hop has grown and evolved from its humble beginnings in the Bronx during the early 1970s, the number of musical styles invoked and societal trends discussed in rap music has grown with it. In the 40 years since DJ Kool Herc first started sampling different songs to create a new genre, and indeed in the roughly 25 years since N.W.A first exclaimed "Fuck tha Police" and the members of A Tribe Called Quest "pushed positivity," Hip-Hop has emerged as a cross-racial, cross-national, and cross-cultural movement that encompasses a cornucopia of different messages and styles.

Hip-Hop music is no longer dominated by the generation that founded the movement. This era is now known as the golden age of Hip-Hop (Green). It was a time when explosive cultural criticism and unbridled musical energy reigned supreme and the excitement of a new means of expression left an indelible mark

on the notion of the black identity. The question that needs to be answered, then, is what defines Hip-Hop today? If, as Kitwana and Rabaka assert, the Hip-Hop generation is defined by the artists born between 1965-1984, what defines contemporary rappers who, by and large, do not fit into this narrow window?

In 2014, much to the dismay of many Hip-Hop fans and critics, Macklemore, a Seattle based white rapper, received the Grammy Award for best rap album over the critically lauded rapper Kendrick Lamar. The slew of blog posts and discussions that followed all came to similar conclusions: Hip-Hop is dead. One journalist wrote, "Hip Hop is not what it used to be and it's quite apparent to true MC's" (VIBE). As Kenny G did to Jazz and Elvis did to Rock and Roll, Hip-Hop, for better or for worse, has been slowly re-appropriated by white artists and audiences. But to boldly claim that "Hip-Hop is dead" is to discount the decidedly *new* direction Hip-Hop is taking.

The majority of rap music today is, in some way, a response to the rap music that preceded it. Unlike in its infancy, Hip-Hop artists now have 40 years of music on which to hang their artistic hats. It is no longer a brand new genre and its deep connection to the Civil Rights and Black Power movement has waned. Due to commercialization and widespread appeal to all races, Hip-Hop has become its own major language. The radicalism and subversion that defined the lyrics of the golden age have, at least in mainstream Hip-Hop, rapidly diminished from the genre. However, like any art form that has existed for an extended period of time, Hip-Hop is poised to borrow from the old and respond to new cultural discourses. It can be called "post-Hip-Hop," or an extension of the millennial

generation. Whatever pithy critical moniker one chooses to attach to it, Hip-Hop is not dead: it is *evolving.*

Rap music is not only still alive and well, but now in fact, a world-wide phenomenon that appeals to a variety of different listeners. Its widespread appeal has brought rappers of almost every race and nationality out of the woodwork. With the proliferation of the internet and a general advancement in technology, any person with a YouTube account and a simple computer program can produce rap music and share it with millions of people. Hip-Hop's role as a deterritorializing force has not disappeared; it has simply been expanded and turned in on itself. However, that is not to say that Hip-Hop has completely abandoned its traditional underpinnings of questioning the white hegemonic order. Artists such as Run the Jewels, Kendrick Lamar, J-Cole, and Ab-Soul have consistently produced music that keeps the spirit of the golden age alive. The renewed discussions of race that have emerged as a result of the Ferguson Missouri riots, the Trayvon Martin controversy, and the death of Eric Garner in New York City have provided these artists with a platform on which to question the issues that rappers in the 1980s and 1990s based their lyrics on. However, in my opinion, the future of Hip-Hop is represented best by the work of artists such as Das Racist and Odd Future, who rap from the margins of the Hip-Hop community itself.

The members of Das Racist , who found their fame virally through the internet, do not possess the same traditional black, inner-city pedigree as their Hip-Hop predecessors. Formed at the prestigious Wesleyan University in

Connecticut, Das Racist burst on to the music scene with the song, "Combination Pizza Hut and Taco-Bell" in which the group's two rappers, Himanshu Suri, (a first generation Punjabi American) and Victor Vazquez (a first generation Afro-Cuban-Italian American), did little else besides chant, "I'm at the combination Pizza Hut and Taco Bell" to each other, ad nauseam. The critical response to the song was immediate. A reporter from the village voice posed the question, " Is this a joke that everyone thinks is a graduate thesis, or vice versa?" (Harvilla). A journalist from the New York Times asked the group, "Do you see your work as a critique of white America?" (Solomon). These questions were indicative of Das Racist's rise in popularity. Not only were Suri (Heems) and Vazquez (Kool A.D) culturally different from other popular rappers, they were seen as more educated than their peers. Heems was a head hunter for a New York financial services company before hitting it big, and Kool A.D had a "cartoon off" with the New Yorker magazine. The critics saw Das Racist as a novelty: a group that did not adhere to popular rap music's increasingly narrow definition. In response to the attention Das Racist garnered from elite publications, Kool A.D, in the group's interview with the New York Times, pointedly asked the interviewer: "would we even be on the page of this publication if we had not gone to Wesleyan?" (Solomon).

The power of Das Racist's music, as Heems and Kool A.D were quick to point out, did not come from their cultural heritage or elite education, but rather the way in which they deconstructed the language of Hip-Hop through the art form itself. Das Racist can be described as joke rap, intellectual rap, weed rap, or

just plain stupid rap, but the best description of the aims of the group are in the words of Heems himself. He stated in an interview: “With rap, it's identity. A lot of the project was about being brown, and how the discourse in America has always been black and white. Das Racist was about wanting to insert ourselves in that discourse” (Ruttenberg 1). More than anything, the members of Das Racist wanted to express their role in a society where the dominant racial discussion focuses on the contentious relationship between black and white people.

Like Hip-Hop artists in the golden era, Das Racist used a minor language to reclaim a sense of identity in the face of oppression. The complications that arise from this idea are due to the fact that the language Das Racist deterritorializes is Hip-Hop itself. It is fair to say that the members of Das Racist have most likely not been oppressed in the same way that the black community has in the United States, but the very fact that they are brown in a white dominated society pushes them to the margins. In this sense, the members of Das Racist are oppressed both by the white community at large *and* by the already established notions of what it means to be a Hip-Hop artists. They are faced with, in the words of Heems, “the peculiar plight of being brown in public and being involved in black art forms that are largely marketed to white people” (Ruttenberg 3).

In the Das Racist song, “All Tan Everything,” Heems and Kool A.D examine their “peculiar plight.” Both the title of the song and the repeated refrain, “All tan everything,” are borrowed from a Jay-Z song, “Run This Town,” in which he states, “pledge your allegiance/Get your fatigues on, all black

everything/ Black cards, black cars/All black everything." Although Jay-Z does not explicitly state the reason for his propensity to buy black objects, it is fair to assume that he is claiming that, in a broad sense, Hip-Hop belongs to the black community. The members of Das Racist certainly see it this way. In their song, tan refers to their brown complexions and not the color of their clothes. In Das Racist's sample of Jay-Z's lyrics, the word black is seamlessly replaced by the word tan. This change sets the tone for the entire song. Heems and Kool A.D take control of the black art form and put it into terms of their own experiences as Punjabi and Afro-Cuban-Italian Americans respectively.

In "All Tan Everything" Heems declares, "Tan John Belushi in Coogi/ Dipping in Coochie/ Tan Chris Farley in Gucci smoking on doobies." These lyrics provide valuable insight into how the members of Das Racist see themselves. Heems is, in a sense a comedian rapper, likening himself to white comedy legends John Belushi and Chris Farley. In addition, he asserts himself as a part of Hip-Hop culture, mentioning that he wears Coogi and Gucci clothing: two brands that are historically popular in black Hip-Hop culture. Heems straddles the line between white and black. He has the comedic timing of a Belushi or Farley, but dresses like a typical rap artist. However, instead of pigeonholing his identity within these definitions, he qualifies his style as distinctly *tan*. In this way, Heems borrows from both white and black culture, but does not dispense with his own Punjabi heritage or "tan-ness." By virtue of using Hip-Hop as a means of artistic expression, Heems deterritorializes the major language of white culture. But in

borrowing from Hip-Hop culture and making it his own, he also deterritorializes rap music itself.

Heems's decidedly post-Hip-Hop sensibility is even more pronounced in a later section. Again, he takes common Hip-Hop tropes and puts them into terms of his own racial identity. Jay-Z, in "Run this Town," colors his material objects black in order to reinforce his African-American identity. Heems, in the same sense, asserts his identity through material objects, but does so in terms of his *Indian* identity. He raps, "All you see is rupees when you Google/Rubies in his doodoo/ Emeralds in his turban." Heems's line takes on a dual meaning. While it is clear that he invokes the materialism that is irrevocably connected to Hip-Hop's language, he also pokes fun at Hip-Hop's obsession with obtaining luxury items. Heems claims that he is so rich and successful that he actually defecates rare gems, and places emeralds in his turban. His assertion is clearly absurd, but not dissimilar to commercially successful songs like "I Like Tuh," where the rapper Carnage states, "I like tuh make money get turnt/I smoke the best weed in the states/ I don't fuck 'round with no fakes/ I have to scrape the whole damn plate/ I like to go to Steak 'n Shake." Heems at once employs the language of Hip-Hop and simultaneously tears it down. He effectively shifts Hip-Hop's discourse from black to Punjabi, and highlights the rap community's emphasis on material goods.

The post-Hip-Hop movement, as shown through the work of Das Racist, represents the expansion of an art form that was once reserved primarily for the black voice. Hip-Hop, at least in its original form, was an opportunity for disenfranchised black youths to voice their frustrations and concerns with the

oppressive cultural climate that surrounded them. However, as Hip-Hop becomes more entrenched in popular culture, the early voices of Hip-Hop that rang out like a bell in the night in the 1970s have been muted. Frightened listeners' complaints against Hip-Hop's black radicalism, while far from completely gone, have waned.

In 1989 the rapper Chuck D famously said, "Rap is our invisible TV network. It's the CNN that black people never had" (Gold). For years Chuck D's words, spoken during the heart of rap's golden era, have been latched on to by critics and heralded as an essential quote to describe the black community's relationship with Hip-Hop. Significantly however, nine years later Chuck D amended this quotation. He stated:

> Rap is now a worldwide phenomenon. Rap is the CNN for young people all over the world because now you can hear from rappers in Croatia and find out what they talk about and how they're feeling. Rappers from Italy, rappers from Africa. Rap has become on unofficial network of the young mentality. (Jah 265).

In less than ten years, Hip-Hop changed from the invisible voice of the African-American youth into the ultra-visible voice for youth of all races and nationalities across the world. Hip-Hop is now not only about black individualism, it is about *any* individual who feels as though his or her voice needs to be heard. Hip-Hop as a whole will always be deeply connected to the African-American community's experience with racism and oppression. But, as this paradigm shifts to include *all* communities that feel as though they need to be heard, the fundamental definition of Hip-Hop as a deterritorializing language holds steady.

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