Foreword

Travis Harris

I ain’t going to hold you, we really set out to change the game with this issue. This issue has been a long time coming. We first started working on it in 2021. During this time, people were starting to come back outside after being on lockdown from COVID. We had received a number of submissions that had promising potential but many of the submissions were repetitive. By repetitive, I mean that they used the same methods, did not offer any new insights into Hip Hop theory, and did not build on the field. Along with reviewing the submissions, I noticed the same thing was happening throughout Hip Hop scholarship. More and more I read about trends in “Hip Hop” that were really trends in popular culture. I could not distinguish between academic Hip Hop scholars, bloggers, and journalists who wrote about Hip Hop. They were all taking some themes or rap music that they were interested in and presenting their ideas about Hip Hop based on the music. At times, Hip Hop was being used to confirm what they were already thinking. Then, at other times, academics did not properly position themselves in alignment with Hip Hop. The logic seemed to be that since they grew up listening to rap music, they understood Hip Hop. Even more problematic were those who did not recognize how their race could potentially play a role in perpetuating White Supremacy while researching and publishing on Hip Hop. While I was engaging with the scholarly texts, I was also confronted with the harsh realities of a quasi-COVID world. We are still dealing with death, a decrease in life expectancy, police terrorism, food apartheid, high unemployment, sickness, physical and sexual assault, abuse, a failed democracy, oppressive laws that restrict what we can and cannot do with our bodies, and mass killings. In light of these waves of oppressions, I realized that we could not keep going in this repetitive cycle. We needed something more.

With that being said, we present the only issue of Volume 9. To bring this issue together, I reached out to all the authors of submissions that had the potential to break the cycle that has been widespread throughout Hip Hop studies. I built relationships and met with each author. We discussed the vision they had for their article and the vision I had for the future direction of the journal. After multiple meetings, I realized that it would be beneficial if all the authors of this issue could meet. During this meeting, I laid out the vision for the future of the journal so that we could all get on the same page. Next, each author shared their individual projects. As each author shared, everyone was able to provide feedback to that particular author. The goal was to ensure that every author was clear on the mission, allow for authors’ work to be in conversation with each other and
present as unified a perspective on Hip Hop and Hip Hop studies as possible in a general issue. Our hope is that as you read through this issue, you will see the fruits of our collaboration.

While we were working on this issue, I was teaching AMST 390 “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: A Hip Hop Understanding of the Revolution.” “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” examined revolutionary aspects of movements and revolutionary figures from a Hip Hop perspective and within Hip Hop. I was working out ideas about Hip Hop and the vision for the journal became crystal clear. In this class, one of the students conducted research on and analyzed graffiti. They took photos of graffiti behind the old Black Prince Distillery in Clifton, NJ. The cover photo of this issue is one of the pics that they shared with me and gave me permission to use. This wall represents a graffiti battle. If you examine the photo closely, you can see where writers sprayed over other writers. One of the key points that I discussed with my class and is important to Hip Hop is how battling develops creative energy that only comes from the Hip Hop sharpening their skills. Also, when it comes to graffiti, there is a unique visual representation of and from battling that can only be created by battling. This image presents explosive, dynamic, and creative energy from writers who created a new identity and left their tag on this wall that could last for decades or centuries to come. In the same way these writers did their thing, this is what we want to do with this issue, leave our mark.

In wrapping up this foreword, I need to give some shout outs. First, I need to shout out the authors of this issue. They did not have to meet with me. Honestly, I was hard on them in my critiques and what I required, yet they delivered. Their articles went through several rounds of editing. In addition to the normal blind peer review process, each piece was edited several more times. All the authors published here stuck to it and made the necessary changes. Authors, you know the work you put into writing, changing, fixing, and updating. Thank you and strong work. I also need to show some love to Lyfestile. Lyfestile is an emcee out of the Lou, St. Louis. I met him through A&R Kazia Steele. I wanted to get someone from the culture to be a part of this issue. Kazia delivered and Lyfestile came through. He helped to edit and coauthor. His input is important and on point. Lyfestile’s presence offered a level of accountability that we are not usually afforded in academia. I also want to shout out my editorial board. I know I highlight their work every issue but without them, this journal would not be possible. Thank you to every Hip Hop scholar that offered a blind review. Thank you to every Associate Editor that worked on this issue in any capacity. Thank you Sabine Kim for your line-by-line copy editing. Finally, thank you to those who contributed through Hip Hop’s collective consciousness. There was a rhythm and flow to putting this issue together. This joint was rocking. Now my hope is that this joint hits and changes the game.
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Funk What You Heard: Hip Hop Is a Field of Study

Travis Harris, Lyfestyle, Dana Horton, Frederick Gooding, M. Nicole Horsley and Shayne McGregor

“Funk What You Heard” is a beaconing call to all scholars who engage with Hip Hop studies. This article lays out the ways in which Hip Hop studies should properly respond to the wave of oppressions currently pounding the world. With several key date markers in place for Hip Hop studies, Tricia Rose’s Black Noise in 1994 and Murray Foreman and Mark Anthony Neal’s That’s the Joint! in 2004, “Funk What You Heard” charts the path forward for the future of Hip Hop studies. Black Noise provided the original blueprint for studying Hip Hop and That’s the Joint! stamped “hip-hop studies” into history. Although we are close to thirty years since Black Noise, lyrical analysis is a dominant method for Hip Hop studies. Also, although we have a clearly identifiable field, academics still treat Hip Hop as an interesting topic they can write about without speaking to the field. “Funk What You Heard” calls for something more. We can no longer continue down this path of weak analysis and rewriting Hip Hop theories that have been discussed time and time again. Our contemporary waves of oppression have raised the stakes. With the path charted out, we ultimately call on Hip Hop scholars to answer their ancestral call. Answering this call pragmatically looks like building on the field, developing new and innovative research methods, and engaging with all the elements of Hip Hop. As far as the unseen, we will leave that up to your reflection with Hip Hop’s collective consciousness that is not bound by space and time.

“Can we just get one world-changing, lifetime and historical event to happen at a time,” one of my students remarked during class. While these are not their exact words, this 20-year-old’s view of the world reflects the tragedy after tragedy and trauma after trauma that has recently rocked the world. Within a global pandemic, mass shootings everywhere from elementary schools to stores, to the next breaking news story about another once in a lifetime event, for young people, this has been their norm. How are we going to respond to these waves of oppression?

The waves of oppression challenge the way we as academics, and even activists for that matter, do things. In the past, we have primarily focused on rap music. Inside academia and in popular culture, when it came to talking about Hip Hop, defining Hip Hop, determining where it originated, saying who Hip Hop belonged to and so on, the conversation always reverted to rappers, song lyrics or something to do with the music. The editorial team arrived at this conclusion by reviewing more than one thousand scholarly Hip Hop sources, hundreds of submissions to the journal, publishing numerous scholarly Hip Hop texts, attending Hip Hop studies conferences and sessions at conferences, peer reviewing for several presses and other scholarly journals and staying engaged with popular culture through various media outlets including social media.¹ Throughout this examination and engagement with thousands of Hip Hop texts, rap

¹ There are several additional scholarly works that provide evidence and make claims about the central focus of Hip Hop studies being rap music such as Jeff Chang’s edited collection Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-hop (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006).

[6]
music is front and center. Based on these waves of oppression, “we need something more.”

Focusing on rap music will not offer enough to address what we are facing if we want real change in the future. We are calling for academia and those outside of academia who are listening to go beyond rap music. Transformational and revolutionary change that responds to a decrease in the life expectancy of Black life, COVID, mass killings, police brutality, women not having control of their bodies and oppression after oppression requires a change in direction. Primarily thinking about Hip Hop as rap music limits our understanding and potential of what Hip Hop is and can be and do. It narrows our perspective to thinking about Hip Hop within certain spaces, mainly the US, or not recognizing the connections between Hip Hop in the US and around the world. Hip Hop is an African diasporic phenomenon, not bound by space and time, made up of a collective consciousness, and a culture with global cultures.

In addition to improperly preparing us to respond correctly to the waves of oppression we are enduring, the overwhelming focus on rap music has been the primary factor limiting academia’s understanding, conception, analysis, discussion and presentation of Hip Hop. Whenever scholars talk about sexism, misogyny, a Hip Hop generation, and all the other fields/disciplines that it intersects with such as religion, education, politics, literature, gender, activism, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, communication, rhetoric, culture, critical race theory, missiology, law and psychology, they all look to rappers and rap music. It is precisely this emphasis on rap music that has determined the theories, methods, and overall fabric of Hip Hop studies. The predominant method of Hip Hop studies is lyrical analysis. Rappers are the main ones from the culture that guide the theories of Hip Hop studies. Even more problematic, a lot of Hip Hop studies focuses on industry rap music. There is a considerable amount of scholarship that deals with rappers outside of the industry but the same way in which mainstream rappers dominate popular culture discussions, they also dominate academic discourse and overshadow the work of scholars that are not limited by the mainstream. There are multiple problems and repercussions produced by the scholarly (and popular culture) overemphasis on rappers and rap music.

As already mentioned, the biggest casualty is Hip Hop because, even though numerous Hip Hop scholars and Hip Hop heads have said Hip Hop is not just rap music, Hip Hop continues to be synonyms with rap music. Another major consequence is the lack of attention to every other element of Hip Hop. Hip Hop studies has not fully considered the ways that breakin, graffiti and deejaying and all the other elements and components can inform Hip Hop theories, methods and history. For example, Kymberly Pinder, in *Painting the Gospel: Black Public Art and Religion in Chicago* (2016), reveals how including graffiti challenges Hip Hop scholars to revisit the religious and artistic

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traditions that have contributed to Hip Hop. Instead of just focusing on spirituals and the blues, Hip Hop scholars must now account for graffiti forbearers such as the artist William Scott, who painted multiracial interpretations of the Bible in churches. Pinder also draws out a lineage that includes William Walker, Bernard Williams, and the Chicago Public Art Group–trained rapper and graffiti artist Damon Lamar Reed. Other than Pinder’s work, there are very few histories of Hip Hop that take note of Scott, Walker, Williams, and others who contributed to graffiti. With this in mind, it can become abundantly clear how bringing in all the elements and components of Hip Hop will completely transform how we talk about, study, and even understand Hip Hop. Even further, recognize the potential revolutionary role Hip Hop can play in our world today.

**Laying Out the Field of Hip Hop Studies**

Hip Hop studies is constantly under attack. The most recent attack came from some scholars who claimed that there is no field of Hip Hop studies and that it is as interdisciplinary as it is. In other words, they can discuss Hip Hop from their own disciplines and do not have to speak to any key texts within the field of Hip Hop studies. Of course, this does not only happen to Hip Hop, this same type of approach also happens to Africana studies, race and a variety of other fields. Scholars think they could just mention Black people or Hip Hop and now they are doing “race” or “Hip Hop studies.” This is highly problematic. It shows the very ways in which White Supremacy manifests in higher education. There are particular groups of people and theoretical approaches that are considered lesser in higher education and Hip Hop studies is one of them. Also, what is considered acceptable for these “lesser” fields such as Hip Hop studies is not acceptable for other traditional disciplines. Whenever someone speaks to history, sociology, religion, etc., scholars are required to cite the canon of these disciplines. They must know and, at times, show the key historiographical shifts throughout that discipline. While at times, gatekeeping within these disciplines have been used to reinforce academic boundaries that perpetuate White Supremacy and ensure that other voices are silenced, this does not mean that the pendulum should swing completely in the opposite direction and that when it comes to Hip Hop, anyone can say anything and claim to be Hip Hop or do Hip Hop studies.

For the field of Hip Hop studies, there is a clearly recognizable bibliography of more than thirty years of texts that goes back to the early 1980s. That’s the Joint!: The Hip Hop Studies Reader (2004) traces these texts from the 1980s, and with the third edition coming out, to present day. This means that there are some Hip Hop scholars that have

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4 The particular scholars we are referring to have a series of emails exchanged with the Editor in Chief of the journal. They made these claims in the email exchange. We do not want to invite any of their drama back to the journal, so we decided to keep their names anonymous.

been working in the field of Hip Hop studies for decades. In many ways, “title of this piece” is a return to the first issue and article published by JHHS, “The Hip in Hip Hop: Toward a Discipline of Hip Hop Studies.” The initial article laid out the landscape of Hip Hop studies by highlighting both Hip Hop as a global phenomenon and the depth of Hip Hop studies throughout academia, from the classes being taught to the minor at the University of Arizona. Building on these works, we aim to explicitly lay out the field of Hip Hop studies.

In the first edition of That’s the Joint! (2004), Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal introduced the term “hip-hop studies,” thereby providing a marking point of identifying the field. Unfortunately, while they presented this term, many scholars have, in good faith, written about Hip Hop studies without properly acknowledging their work and the field. For example, Julia Chang, in her review essay “Keeping It Real: Interpreting Hip-Hop,” calls Hip Hop studies a subfield. More recently, Jeffrey Ogbar, in “The Mark of Criminality: Rhetoric, Race, and Gangsta Rap in the War-on-Crime Era,” stated: “Over the last decade and a half, there has emerged a veritable subfield known as Hip-Hop Studies, of which rap music is a central component.” While there are numerous additional examples, Ogbar’s is most telling because he explicitly states that rap music is central. Not to throw stones at anyone, well maybe those who think they do not have to engage with Hip Hop studies but still want to write about Hip Hop, this is a call for unity and to bring all Hip Hop scholars on the same page moving forward.

Spelling Hip Hop and Hip Hop Studies

When JHHS started, we decided to go with the spelling of Hip Hop. We will maintain that spelling because it linguistically identifies Hip Hop as a proper noun. We are aware of KRS One’s spellings of Hiphop, Hip Hop, and hip hop. We are heavily influenced by KRS One but decided to go with Hip Hop to recognize its singular identity while holding in tension the many engagements and manifestations of Hip Hop. Additionally, we would like to report the work of our Editor in Chief, Travis Harris along with Hip Hop scholar and educator, Tasha Iglesias. They both reached out to the APA to get the hyphen removed from hip-hop and be officially spelled Hip Hop. They wrote an official state and provided primary sources from Cornell’s Hip Hop archive.

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9 See “It’s ‘Hip Hop,’ Not ‘hip-hop,’” included in this issue.
Subfields

Starting in 2004, we have a clearly identifiable field of Hip Hop studies that can point to at least five subfields within Hip Hop studies. These subfields are Hip Hop based education (HHBE), global Hip Hop studies, religion and Hip Hop studies, Hip Hop feminism, Hip Hop dance studies and Hip Hop linguistics. There are also overlaps between each subfield, for example scholars of HHBE are also working in global Hip Hop studies. To be a subfield, all these fields, within Hip Hop studies, must contain a traceable historiography and key scholars. For example, Emery Pretchar is a key scholar in HHBE. There is a journal of Global Hip Hop Studies with Hip Hop scholars from all over the world working together. JHHS recently published a special issue on Hip Hop feminism in 2021. Daniel White Hodge is a leading scholar in religion and Hip Hop studies. An important text to Hip Hop linguistics is Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language, edited by H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook.

Hip Hop Theories and Methods

Due to the over infatuation with rappers and rap music we have yet to reach our fullest potential as Hip Hop studies scholars in creating new, cutting edge and fresh research methods and theories. In Tricia Rose’s classic text, Black Noise (1994), she states this about her methodology:

I have listened attentively to a large majority of rap albums available, transcribed over five dozen songs, taped and viewed hundreds of rap music videos, researched rap samples, attended over

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10 “Your Spot,” flyer, Johan Kugelberg Hip Hop Collection, #8021, Box 33, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:1334330
thirty rap concerts and conferences, and carefully followed the coverage of rap music in popular music magazines, newspapers, and scholarly publications.\textsuperscript{11}

Unfortunately, it is more than thirty years later, and we still have not moved beyond Rose’s methodology. Arguably, her attendance at rap concerts may now be little more than the usual method of lyrical analysis. The prevalent theories and methods throughout Hip Hop studies are static and stale. Not only does lyrical analysis limit our growth as a field but it also leads to misunderstandings and inaccurate theories about Hip Hop. Our biggest question for scholars conducting lyrical analysis is this: “How do you know what is real and how do you know if you have an accurate interpretation of the lyrics?” The only way to be one hundred percent accurate about the intention of the rapper is to talk to the rapper.

A major understudied field in conjunction with Hip Hop studies is performance studies. Performance studies is influenced by Kemetic thought.\textsuperscript{12} Performance studies seeks to understand what is real and raises the question as to whether Hip Hoppas are just performing in their songs. It leads us to ask, are the performances ones in which we know that they are just playing a role or are the performances an opportunity to fully express themselves. This is extremely important because lyrical analysis does not make this distinction clear. It is quite possible for the listener/researcher to think the performance is an expression of the rapper’s reality and the rapper’s intention could be to show how well they rap and just perform a role. To say it another way, some rappers have no intention to do drugs, kill, disrespect women or men, or hurt anyone. Their goal is to show off their rhyming skills with metaphors, similes and wordplay.

Methodological approaches that demonstrate an inaccurate or unverified analysis of “Hip Hop” are rampant throughout Hip Hop studies. Though they claim to offer insights into the culture, these approaches are narrowly focused and are usually really a critique of industry rap music. Readings from small sample sizes prove problematic. We need to be critical of our Hip Hop methodologies relying on analyzing popular culture, considering the White Supremacist and capitalistic infrastructures that use popular music as a means of control. White Supremacy functions in the music industry in such a way that it rewards emcees who perform their role in a manner that conforms to rather than challenges the infrastructures of White Supremacy. Therefore, within the larger music industry rappers have little agency. They are forced to choose between their personal

\textsuperscript{11} Tricia Rose, \textit{Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America} (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

convictions and what the industry requires for them to make money. Also, scholars must take note of their positionality in relation to Hip Hop.

Some examples of these methodological shortcomings are seen in Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin’s representation of misogyny in rap music, and Kellie D. Hay and Rebekah Farrugia’s analysis of Black masculinity, Hip Hop, and inner life. Weitzer and Kubrin constructed their study solely on an examination of four hundred and three songs. They chose these songs based on Hip Hop albums they could find that went platinum between 1992 and 2000. They found one hundred and thirty albums that contained a total of one thousand nine hundred and twenty-two songs. Next, “using SPSS, a simple random sample of 403 songs was drawn and then analyzed.” This is the most blatant example of using industry rap music to make claims about Hip Hop in general. They are two White academics whose method is an analysis of four hundred and three songs. Their analysis becomes even more problematic when they state: “We document five themes related to the portrayal of women in rap music and link them to larger cultural and music industry norms and the local, neighborhood conditions that inspired this music.” They make claims about Hip Hop artists based solely on their interpretation of the music and write about Hip Hop as situated in local neighborhoods that they have no investment in nor knowledge of.

While Weitzer and Kubrin’s method is problematic, two white women scholars, Hay and Farrugia, cite Weitzer and Kubrin in putting forward their theory of Black fatherhood. They state: “Weitzer and Kubrin summarize that ‘it is not only the material cost of fathering a child that is feared in these [rap]songs but also fatherhood in general.’” Their referencing of Weitzer and Kubrin reveals just how distant they are from Hip Hop because they are using two academic’s interpretation of not only industry rap music, but rap songs that went platinum. Plainly, they are using an interpretation (their understanding of Weitzer and Kubrin’s work) of an interpretation (Weitzer and

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17 Even if they do claim to have visited one local neighborhood, one or several visits is not enough to equip them with the necessary lens to understand more than four hundred songs.
18 Some readers may question why we decided to point out their identity granted that the authors are aware of their identity and addressed this in the article. We highlight their identity because our focus is on the methodological approach they took to understand the inner life of Black men. As White women, they are quite distanced from the inner lives of Black men; they are the opposite gender and race. As we explain later in this section, this distance is increased when considering that they examined music videos and do not elevate the voices of Black men.
Kubrin’s examination of platinum songs) of a performance by a rapper who created songs in such a way they would go platinum. Furthermore, this selection of rap music epitomizes the control of White Supremacy and capitalism on the music industry since they are specifically the songs that went platinum. Hay and Farrugia essentially argue that “it is public life that pressures the possibilities of private, inner life,” further pathologizing Black fatherhood. They build on the work of scholars that use rap music to make their arguments and claims about Black inner life, an argument which they base on two music videos of song lyrics written by women artists. According to Hay and Farrugia, they aim to use the two videos, Mama Sol and The N.U.T.S.’s “Manhood” and Rapsody’s “The Man,” to “form a tidalectic of their own; one contains the conditions that lead to oppression and untimely death (The Man), while the other holds the promise of hope (Manhood).” The most obvious problem with this method is the erasure and silencing of Black men in these claims about “the inner and social lives of Black youth, men, and fatherhood.” It is astounding that this article was even published. Without reflecting on their own relationship to whiteness and the power of authority it bestows, they claim to “offer insight into the construction of Black masculinity, affect, and hip hop aesthetics,” conveying to us their understanding of the inner lives of Black males. In their discussion of “The Man,” they make the following statements about a young Black male:

- His dreams are shadows, captured in images of Puff Daddy and Mohammad Ali, but even they are juxtaposed to images of gang figures and fallen “homies.”
- The layering of gangster life and iconic rappers illustrates the public constructions of manhood that shape his desired identity.
- Hustling and the drug-dealing life provide him with a fast track to the kind of money that makes him feel like “the man.”
- As we note above, the young man’s inner life was arrested before he reached puberty. Dreams were left behind, as were joy, pleasure, touch, and emotions outside of pain. Only crosses and icons, left as relics on a dresser, give us a glimpse of his childhood innocence.
- What is more, the only men who affect him are deadbeat dads, dead rappers, Hollywood gangsters, and police officers.

If there is any doubt about what they mean by these statements, in the conclusion they state: “‘The Man’ casts inner life as pressure where even in the youth’s bedroom – the sanctuary that holds his most precious symbols – there is no supply of solace, only a place to drop and pray while police cars flash outside.” While their goal to make a tidalectic synthesizing “the promise of hope” of the other video is laudable, these egregious statements contain a major pitfall. They present Black men as stereotypical caricatures that fall in line with the same framing of the Black male beast, the rapist, and the hyper masculine thug portrayed by racist propaganda disseminated throughout American 

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history. Hay and Farrugia are conscious of this being a potential interpretation of their work and aim to both push back against Moynihan’s representation of Black men as well as challenge the notion of a “crisis of Black fatherhood.” Their awareness of these two perspectives is precisely the problem in the work. Hay and Farrugia write as if they have lived experience of and are in a position to analyze the intersections of Blackness, class, and manhood under anti-Blackness. The danger in this work is their perceived awareness will grant them access to some Black spaces they should not have access to. In addition, there is a great danger their work will be uncritically cited and used as evidence for similar readings. Our hope is that if Hip Hop methodologies are applied, scholars encountering mischaracterizations of Black masculinity will check their sources and develop holistic readings.

Hip Hop scholars do not have to completely stop doing lyrical analysis; there is a way to analyze rap music and rap music videos that brings the researcher closer to understanding the Hip Hoppa and Hip Hop. The most effective method to examine rap music and videos entails an in-depth analysis of the emcee, the emcee’s life, those who write the lyrics, the emcee’s intentions and the reception of the song or music video. This can be achieved in a variety of ways: reviewing documentaries, acting as participant observer during the creation of music videos, interviewing the team (producers, directors, writers, and emcees), and holding focus study groups with a population of listeners. Several shows such as MTV’s Behind the Scenes and Making the Video, VH 1’s Behind the Scenes and Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs’ show Making the Band, point to what goes into making music and videos. Emcee Mark “Bizzle” Felder’s music video for “Regular People” (2011) allows the viewer to witness the production of rap music videos. Providing a documentary style perspective on the making of the video for “Regular People,” Bizzle comments:

And truth be told
A lot of this is make believe
It’s time to let the truth be told
They give you what you pay to see
But, when the camera’s off, they’re just…
Regular people mayne

Still image from Bizzle’s music video for “Regular People.”

23 Hay and Farrugia, “Black Fatherhood, Hip Hop, and Inner Life,”
Bizzle and the creative directors provide an illustration of how rap videos are constructed: a set with actors performing roles and presenting a reality that, oftentimes, is distant from that of the emcees. We are not arguing that every rap music video is set up this way. Rather, we challenge Hip Hop scholars to conduct research that digs deeper. We encourage scholars to contact the artists and others on the team when developing close contextual readings of music videos to discover the artist’s intents and purposes. This also applies to rap music. There are Hip Hop scholars such as Cheryl Keyes, who conducted ethnographic studies and interviews with emcees to develop her canonical study. We advocate for this to be the norm when using lyrical analysis; seeking first-person accounts to assist with close readings of the art and getting as close to what is real as possible.

Shout out to Hip Hop scholars of graffiti, dance, and deejaying, simply by studying the other elements move beyond lyrical analysis. There are some Hip Hop methods that we would like to present for Hip Hop scholars to build off. We are not presenting an exhaustive list of all the methods used in Hip Hop studies. We are highlighting a few beyond lyrical analyses and calling for Hip Hop scholars to research, write, and create Hip Hop methods. Hip Hop studies need methods that do not approach Hip Hop from a deficit lens. Hip Hop methods must engage with all the elements of Hip Hop, from performances to albums, to compact discs, to clothes, flyers, posters and so on. Most importantly, in response to these waves of oppression, it is imperative that we develop methods that do the work by elevating the culture and not just the researcher.

There are three methods we would like to present: Hiphopography, archival research and geographical research. Archival research and geographical research are self-explanatory. There are several Hip Hop archives including but not limited to Cornell University’s, the College of William and Mary, Hip-Hop Radio Archive, Hip-Hop and Rap Across the Smithsonian, Northside Hip Hop Archive, Universal Hip-Hop Museum, and Rice University. An example of geography research is the work of geographer Joshua Jelly-Schapiro’s who traced all of the location of the fires in the South Bronx in relation to Hip Hop pioneers. For a detailed explanation of Hiphopography, see, James Spady’s “Mapping and Re-Membering Hip Hop History, Hiphopography and African Diasporic History.” Spady developed Hiphopography that brings together Hip Hop and ethnography and consists of in depth interviews where everyone is “mutually present.”

26 I (Harris) must show some love to Hip Hop scholar Dr. Tasha Iglesias. I was talking with her while working on this manuscript. She brought up the need for action-based research, examining Hip Hop materials, and not studying Hip Hop from a deficit lens. She is currently drafting a more detailed piece on research methods in Hip Hop studies.
27 His work is in books and documentaries such as *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas and Decade of Fire*, ed. Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Schapiro (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).
the researchers recognizes the Hip Hoppa’s self-expression, comprehension of how Hip Hoppa’s “understand who they are, how they became who they are, and what they make of the process of becoming who they are,” and an “identification of the complex tropes, mythologies, subtle paralinguistic gestures, imaginings, and narrative strategies that are deployed to frame who they have been or will be.”

The interdisciplinary nature of Hip Hop studies has led to a variety of fields developing Hip Hop theories, yet they all utilize lyrical analysis. Essentially, they take whatever theories that are popular in their own discipline and then mix it with lyrical analysis to develop “Hip Hop theories.” Since we identify Hip Hop as an African diasporic phenomenon, Africana studies provides the ideal theoretical framework to build upon. While numerous scholars have fought back against the stereotypical perspectives of Hip Hop, many of them still place responsibility on the Hip Hoppas. We are not arguing that Hip Hoppas do not play any role at all in their actions, whether they are good or bad, what we are saying is that we need to have a proper perspective of what is really going on. Instead of falling into the Black on Black crime that is usually used to characterize Hip Hop, an apt understanding can come from Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In his chapter “Concerning Violence,” Fanon exquisitely explains the role of colonization in intra-communal violence against other Black people. The colonizer introduced violence into the society and the colonizer’s violence shapes the colonized world. This violence of colonization is not only physical in nature but also affects living conditions, health, beliefs and traditions. Fanon goes on to explain how the overwhelming force of colonization that aims to control every aspect of the colonizer’s life will eventually manifest in internal tensions within the oppressed. They cannot let this rage out on the colonizers, they do let it out on each other.

Kwame Ture, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael, drives this point home. He stated: “Anytime you make an analysis of an oppressed people, in any aspect of their life, and you leave out the enemy, you will never come to a correct analysis. On the contrary, you will blame the oppressed for all their problems.” This is very important because much of the commentary on Hip Hop, even by Hip Hop scholars, ends up blaming Hip Hop for all its problems, while not adequately addressing White supremacy and colonization. Hip Hoppas have been dispossessed, lost family and friends at young ages, battled with drugs and addictions, have been cheated financially, dispossessed again, dealt with poor air quality from the highways that were built through their hoods, had their communal living areas not properly maintained by the city, buried teenagers, constantly faced death, are poor, homeless, mocked, abused, unemployed, and

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31 “Dr Kwame Ture: No Revolution Without Organization,” *YouTube*, uploaded by the Pasma Sobukwe Branch, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROew63_7sg4&t=0s
miseducated among other things and scholars will still blame it on the male rapper. It is almost as if White supremacy does not exist and Hip Hoppas colonized themselves.

We lay out this Africana-informed theory of Hip Hop to accurately make sense of Hip Hop’s world and provide something for Hip Hop scholars to utilize. Our hope is that new Hip Hop theories come forth that build on Africana studies and prior Hip Hop scholarship. We need Hip Hop theories that are created by Hip Hop for Hip Hop, not someone outside of Hip Hop defining what Hip Hop is for us. In From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution, Michael West puts forth this idea of Black internationals and black internationalism. Black internationalism “has a single defining characteristic: struggle.”32 West traces the Black freedom struggle from the 18th century to the 21st century and on both sides of the Atlantic. He describes how struggles locally “intersected with one another across diverse boundaries” and formed “a black international that was greater than the sum total of its constituent parts.”33 His work is important because it creates space for us to think about Black people fighting for Black people and being identified with Black people all around the world (space) and since the beginning of colonization and enslavement (time).34 In fact, West states: “From the outset, black internationalism envisioned a circle of universal emancipation, unbroken in space and time.”35 To drive home how this relates to Hip Hop, he posits that this vision of universal emancipation is personified by Toussaint Louverture and Tupac Shakur, thereby connecting two Black people from two different countries and several centuries in one freedom struggle. This is a skeletal framework we would like to put forth in order to build new theories of Hip Hop studies. Let us now look at how we should look at Hip Hop beyond space and time in detail.

**Hip Hop Beyond Space and Time**

A prevailing theme in Hip Hop studies (and academia as a whole) is to look at 20th century Black history around the Civil Rights Movement. While there have been some arguments towards a “long” Civil Rights Movement that question when the movement started, it is still pretty much universally accepted in Hip Hop studies to think of Hip Hop as a post-soul aesthetic36 or within a post-Civil Rights Movement era. Bakari Kitwana, who coined the term Hip Hop generation states: “The question has been a

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34 While Michael O. West defines the beginning of Black internationalism with Toussaint, I (Harris) would contend that we should start with the first enslaved Africans being taken across the water in the early 1500s.
35 West and Martin, “Contours of the Black International: From Toussaint to Tupac,” 1.
defining one for those of us who grew up in post-civil rights Black America, especially for our generation’s intellectuals.” With over one thousand citations, Kitwana’s book *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (2003), has been solidified as a key idea in Hip Hop studies (and academia). In *It’s Bigger than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation* (2008), M. K. Asante argued for a post-Hip-Hop generation that is “now” 2008, and consists of those who are Hip Hop but have problems with the commercialization of Hip Hop.

The term the “Civil Rights Movement” does not best describe the Black freedom struggle but due to our focus, we will not get into the details of this perspective. What is important is recognizing, as elaborated by West, that the Black freedom struggle did not start in the 1950s and in the US south. Rather, Black people have been fighting for their freedom against Europeans in Africa from the beginning of colonization and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This is how West can go from Touissant to Tupac. By placing Hip Hop within this context of the Black freedom struggle then, we can also go beyond New York 1973 as the starting place of Hip Hop. KRS One contends that Hip Hop started in 3114 BCE, based on the Mayan calendar. While we are not arguing that Hip Hop started then, we need to take KRS’s perspective seriously.

What KRS is getting at is thinking about the elements and essence that make up Hip Hop. We can all agree that the first person to deejay, rap, or spray did not start in 1973. Therefore, we must account for these elements pre-1973. We contend that the essence of these elements is African. That which makes up the composition of all the elements that goes into Hip Hop comes out of the soul, soil, and spirit of Africa. Therefore, Hip Hop is an African diasporic phenomenon. It does not have roots in Africa but is composed of ciphas and flows that flow out of Africa and manifests in New York.

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38 According to Google Scholar, it has 1280 citations. Google Scholar, https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=4117987214521518870&as_sdt=5,47&sciodt=0,47&hl=en


40 Quickly, there are several problems with the term. First, rest in peace to Baba Dhati, a freedom fighter from St. Louis who was active in the freedom struggle from the later 1960s all the way up to this year (2022) when he recently died. I (Harris) researched the naming of the “Civil Rights Movement” and spoke with him in depth about this and we concluded that the White media named it the Civil Rights Movement and not the actual Black people on the ground. Additionally, Vincent Harding posited that naming was far too limited in describing what truly happened in the 1960s in an interview, Vincent Harding, “Vincent Harding — Beyond Civil Rights: Building Spiritual Democracy, Pt 1,” YouTube, uploaded by the Ikeda Center, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFgzPlGOumI. Lastly, Malcolm X spoke out against the framing of a Civil Rights movement because of its US-centric focus and argued for human rights in order to account for Black people all over the world.

41 For a detailed explanation of migrations and the multiple cultures and ethnicities that contributed to Hip Hop, see *Beyond Christian Hip Hop: A Move Towards Christians and Hip Hop* (Routledge Studies in Hip Hop and Religion), ed. Erika Gault and Travis Harris (New York: Routledge, 2019). For a
We are aware of the ongoing debates inside and outside of academia on when Hip Hop started. Some point to dancing and rapping pre-1973 in what they identify as an African American culture and thereby conclude that it is an African American culture phenomenon. There are several major problems with this perspective. One is that the elements that influence Hip Hop are not strictly African American. For example, capoeira has a clear influence on b-boyin/girlin while mambo has a clear influence on the music. One may argue back against the Latino/a influence but there was clearly an Afro-Latino/a presence in New York that is undeniable. Secondly, the dancing and “rapping” that would be considered African American are African diasporic. There is no way these cultural aesthetics would exist without the ciphas and flows coming out of Africa. Lastly, the major contribution we are hoping to make is to elevate the importance of Hip Hop as collective consciousness. That is, a shared idea that “does not appear in any physical reality” and “is outside of space and time.” KRS One talks about it in “40 Years of Hip Hop.”42 This shared idea is not bound by space and time and cannot easily be nailed down to America. This collective consciousness is a part of that same revolutionary spirit that fought back against European slave raiders in Africa, that fought Europeans on the shores of Africa and the ships during saltwater slavery. This collective consciousness is connected to the enslaved songs and spirituals that they used to keep the work rhythm to ensure no African would be punished for not producing the correct amount of work. They also entailed hidden messages on planning their escape because going to heaven also meant going up North to be freed. This collective consciousness is a part of the creative energies in Haiti and Brazil that led to a revolution and the creation of new dance forms. This collective consciousness is a part of those people in the Bronx in the late 1960s and early 1970s where all these elements came together in the middle of dispossession and destruction. The city was on fire, Hip Hoppas were kicked out of their homes by slumlords, the government did not do its part to maintain the city, and unemployment was skyrocketing. Out of all this, the creative energies coalesced, and Hip Hop manifested. Hip Hoppas in the South Bronx took scraps and chaos and created, scratched, breathed, partied and formed a culture based off this collective consciousness.

If we think about Hip Hop from this perspective, then we really need to reconsider existing scholarship and consider room for growth in Hip Hop Studies. A lot of Hip Hop written in the US is too US centric and does not account for Hip Hop around the world or the subfield of global Hip Hop studies. The many events that contributed to the ciphas and flows (cultural interactions throughout the continent, transatlantic slave trade, multiple disposessions, disenfranchisement, benign neglect and so on) makes it more receptive to those who have similar situations and influences its true identity. Therefore, immigrants who were dispossessed and forced to move to certain parts of

42 Lawrence “Kris” Parker (KRS-One), “40 Years of Hip Hop” - KRS 1 Lecture, YouTube, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYEgYnGV0wo.
Europe clung to and found their identity in Hip Hop because their story was present and a part of the collective consciousness of Hip Hop. When we talk about “real Hip Hop” we need to get as close to this idea of a collective consciousness, not underground or conscious rappers.

**Discussion of Hip Hop Elements**

The shift in focus from rap music to collective consciousness opens the conversation to engaging with all the elements of Hip Hop, not just emceeing. On one hand, the proliferation of rap music has even hindered our understanding of the element of emceeing. On the other hand, we have yet, as a field, to give a thorough analysis of all the elements of Hip Hop. How many elements are there in Hip Hop? This is an interesting conversation because in the 1970s, Hip Hoppas did not call them “elements.” Also, one “element” that is usually left out of the conversation is “double dutching.” All of Hip Hop agrees on the four foundational elements: breakin, emceeing, graffiti and deejaying. If they called them elements in the 1970s, then double dutching would have been the fifth element.

After these four foundational elements, this is where the various perspectives come in. The Zulu Nation says there are five elements with the fifth one being knowledge. The Temple of Hip Hop, started by KRS One, claims that there are nine and are symbolized as B.E.G.D.B.F.L.K.E. They are: breakin, emceeing, graffiti art, deejaying, beat boxin, street fashion, street language, street knowledge and street entrepreneurialism. In Daniel White Hodge’s classic text, *The Soul of Hip Hop* (2010) he combines the Zulu Nation and Temple of Hip Hop and lays out ten. He also expands on the element of knowledge to be knowledge of God and self. Here are the ten Hodge puts forth: breakin, emceeing, graffiti art, deejaying, knowledge of God and self, beat boxin, street fashion, street language, street knowledge and street entrepreneurialism.

The Hip Hop elements are a key and critical part of organizing that which is without limit. Together, these interwoven tools have weaved a world-wide web that elevates marginalized voices and articulates intimate personal expressions. These expressions as we know are so powerful to the point where individual people have actualized and realized their personal political power, for once a person exists, engages in critical thinking and can independently decipher the world in which they live (the youth call this being “woke”), they de facto become political beings in that they stand for something.

Of course, with all things human, there are numerous ways to organize, frame and name these organizing principles, or elements, of Hip Hop. For our purposes here, the

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five elements are: deejaying, emceeing, b-boyin/b-girlin, street arts and knowledge of self.

Emceeing represents the talented vocalist who has mastered the art of the rhyme. MC is short for “emcee” or “Master of Ceremonies.” Rather than subject the audience to a vulgar and base display of unimaginative lyrics, the clever and intellectually agile artist can regale the crowd with clever wordplay, creative constructs, marvelous metaphors — all in the name of celebrating their life via Hip Hop. This element has allowed us collectively to recognize local and culturally relevant performers and support the organic growth of talent already within our midst.

Deejaying involves manipulating time and space to find the best rhythm that many people can share communally. This is a powerful responsibility, for just as a careful chemist must mix certain formulas for certain effects, the DJ also must discern the proper musical vibration that corresponds with the appropriate time and space of the gathering. Hip Hop DJs mix and blend songs from various genres together. They scratch records to repeat phrases or create percussive sounds and rhythms. Musical loops are created on the turntables and bodies move. The original Hip Hop DJs focused on sections of music that highlighted the drums and accompanying bass lines of the songs. These sections are called the breakdowns or breaks of the records. When the breaks come on then it’s time for the B-boys and B-girls to shine.

B-boyin/b-girlin describes when individuals, stimulated and motivated by the breaks that the DJ has carefully selected, are literally moved to contort and twist their body as a reflection of the vibrations in public resonation. “Breakdancing” was a term created by the media, early on to describe B-boyin/girlin.

Graffiti incorporates the unbridled artistic expression manifested by those creative souls with Hip Hop pumping well within their bloodstream. Whether it be through stylistic and innovative or inventive forms of dress, new linguistic conventions or colorful graf or graffiti renderings, Hip Hop demands that people stay original and true to what they know to be real. For those who listen and heed this advice, we benefit from witnessing some truly powerfully artistic displays. “Graf” is short for graffiti. In addition to graffiti, there is “street art.” Basically, street art is a legal form of graffiti and offers opportunities for artists to get paid. The legalization of graffiti and the ability to get paid has raised some major ethical questions for Hip Hop and graffiti artists. This element of graffiti is one in which we need to do a better job of bridging academia and the culture. There are some who want to be referred to as graffiti writers, not graffiti artists and definitely not street artists.45

Finally, with knowledge of self, under the premise of “learning by doing,” many Hip Hop practitioners in the spirit of community, freely share what works for them as they navigate the daily vicissitudes and vagaries of life. The concept of knowledge of self was brought to the culture via the influence of the 5% Nation of Gods and Earths as well as teaching from the Nation of Islam. These groups, among others, concern themselves with black consciousness, self-awareness and the pursuit of freedom, justice and equality. This element is arguably the most precious of all since it comprises the very processes that help create Hip Hop. The very process of coming together and filtering ideas and translating social thoughts and concepts and personal experiences into a visual and audio form proves both challenging and enlightening. Terms like “dropping gems” and “building” and “cipher” were also brought to the culture by Hip Hoppers who were members of or influenced by the 5% Nation of Gods and Earths. This exercise of “dropping gems” or “building within a cipher” will certainly heighten appreciation of Hip Hop as a technical craft outside of its entertainment-based focus within the mainstream. This wisdom-sharing principle is unique to real Hip Hop and is often overlooked when critics rightfully cast aspersions on the more commercialized and commodified forms of rap music. However, for those who make time to listen, many remain appreciative -- if not indebted -- for the higher intellectual fruits that Hip Hop has to offer.

In sum, together these elements demonstrate that Hip Hop in its purest form is a very valuable, creative and inspirational art form that is deceptively complex, philosophical and undoubtedly higher order in origin and execution. Ultimately, we must reconcile with the idea that Hip Hop is a powerful, poignant and poetic expression of the human quest for dignity and respect.

We need more Hip Hop scholarship that looks at all these elements. Any scholarly piece submitted to *JHHS* that does not focus on the rapper will automatically be accepted.\(^\text{46}\) When it comes to emceeing, we do not need an increase in quantity, rather, an increase in quality of scholarship. We have noticed that there are either some unspoken ideas about what rappers are doing when they rap, or scholars just do not know. While there are some scholarly works that engage with some of the very specific aspects of emceeing, there is still room for detailed explanation.

Additionally, we need more scholarship on Hip Hop theaters, Hip Hop churches,\(^\text{47}\) Hip Hop photography, Hip Hop documentaries, and Hip Hop and technology. In Chude-
Sokei’s book, *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics* (2016), he does not primarily focus on Hip Hop, but he does bring awareness to the conversation surrounding Black people and technology. He explains how the two are usually placed in opposition to one another, Black people being primitive while technology represents the future. In great detail, he shows not only how this assertion is wrong, but that Black people have been at the forefront of technological innovations. When focusing on Hip Hop, it should be evidently clear how Hip Hoppas used what they had and developed some of the most innovative technologies amid dispossession and destruction. Now we as a field must vigorously investigate all the elements of Hip Hop.

**What Now?**

In Gail Hilson Woldu’s review of Hip Hop studies, “The Kaleidoscope of Writing on Hip-Hop Culture” in 2010, she concluded: “If past trends in writing about hip-hop culture predict future trends accurately, we will continue to be flush in both quality and quantity of published material.”

Woldu was spot on in predicting the exponential growth of articles on Hip Hop since 2010. Thousands of Hip Hop articles have been published since then, but the quality of articles have not been up to par. Our goal with this issue is to encourage Hip Hop scholars to move the field forward. To do this, we suggest: have a clear identity as a Hip Hop scholar that is separate from journalists, develop Hip Hop scholarship that is Hip Hop scholarship through and through, be accountable to the culture and produce work that has that Hip Hop feel.

The heavy focus on rap music by Hip Hop scholars raises the question, what is the difference between a Hip Hop scholar and a journalist? Hip Hop journalists and Hip Hop scholars both speak to popular culture and critique/examine/interrogate mainstream rap music. This has been the case so much throughout the history of Hip Hop studies that Woldu included Hip Hop journalists in her review of Hip Hop scholarship. In addition to what we laid out in the methods section above, many of these popular culture pieces are one-sided. Hip Hop journalists and scholars are analyzing rappers from afar and presenting their opinions to the masses. All the while leaving all the other elements of Hip Hop.

We are calling for Hip Hop scholars to provide more than journalists. To fully capture the element of emceein, Hip Hop scholars must go beyond sound bites, clips, interviews, and songs. We must research all of Hip Hop beyond space and time. We can also set ourselves apart from journalists by having a clearer sense of who our audience is. We have written as if rappers and those in the culture are reading our work. Is it possible that they may come across our three hundred plus page Hip Hop book? Yes, it is but it is unlikely for our books to crossover out of academia and into the culture. If we want those outside of academia to read our work, we need to present it in a way and use language that is accessible for them, not academic jargon. Even when it comes to other

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academics, if we are publishing for undergraduates, then we also need to present our work in an accessible manner. In conversations between editors, several comments have been made about assigning scholarly works, but they do not work because undergraduates have difficulty understanding them.

In addition to setting ourselves apart from journalists, now we must build the field of Hip Hop studies in a Hip Hop way. What we mean by that is having our work be Hip Hop through and through. We need Hip Hop scholars. Scholars who are trained and thoroughly researched the field. Scholars who live Hip Hop, teach Hip Hop, attend Hip Hop conferences and are a part of the Hip Hop culture. We need scholars who are Hip Hop.

We need Hip Hop scholars who cite other Hip Hop scholars. Much of the existing Hip Hop literature does not build on previous Hip Hop works. We can address this. The bibliography for this article includes a list of texts that shape the field in addition to ones used to inform this article. This bibliography provides a well-rounded perspective of the field. Also, we published a “(Global) Hip Hop Studies Bibliography” which provides a list of Hip Hop sources that are not confined solely to the United States. Our hope is that this will be helpful in recognizing Hip Hop is not bound by space and the connections between Hip Hop scholars’ projects around the world.

We are not arguing against the interdisciplinary nature of Hip Hop, rather that Hip Hop studies should be Hip Hop first. In fact, a Hip Hop perspective changes how we see the world and how we understand other disciplines and fields. For example, look at religion. The work of the subfield of religion and Hip Hop studies reveals that Hip Hop challenges religionists’ methodologies due to religionists bringing their preconceived notions about Hip Hoppas to their study subjects. When looking at politics through a Hip Hop lens, it strengthens the existing arguments about the politics of everyday life and shines a light on how those who are usually left out of the political discourse not only have fully informed political views but also have played key roles in mass mediating these political views. During the George Floyd uprising in 2020, the on the ground freedom fighters were exclaiming “It’s bigger than George Floyd” while also playing/shouting Nipsey Hussle’s “Fuck Donald Trump.” Recognizing Hip Hop as a collective consciousness not bound by space and time makes understanding the actions of freedom fighters in 2020 in Minneapolis explicitly clear. As Hip Hoppas, they connected to “the Spirit that permeates everything that is,” because “everything in the universe is interconnected,” and this empowered them to fight for their freedom in the same way our ancestors did from previous generations.

A significant issue we deal with and must address is the absence of accountability in Hip Hop studies that is not missing in Hip Hop. In Hip Hop, one must prove

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themselves. If they fall off and are not right, then they could fall off. In an interview, b-boy Alien Ness said: “If I don’t win, I don’t eat.”\textsuperscript{50} Outkast also rapped:

\begin{quote}
And he kept asking me, "What kinda car you drive? I know you paid
I know y'all got beaucoup of hoes from all them songs that y'all done made"
And I replied that I had been going through the same things that he had
True, I've got more fans than the average man, but not enough loot to last me
To the end of the week, I live by the beat, like you live check-to-check
If you don't move yo' foot then I don't eat, so we like neck to neck
\end{quote}

While some may immediately object to looking at these lyrics while we are arguing against lyrical analysis, we know that Outkast is correct because artists’ actual compensation of funds comes from concerts and people buying their products. In addition to b-boys/b-girls and emcees, deejays often talk about the need to keep the party going. If people leave the floor and the crowd is not feeling the deejay, then they will not get called back again. This is common throughout Hip Hop, but not Hip Hop studies. Academics can write and say things about Hip Hop without any accountability. I (Harris) attended the Hip Hop Show and Prove academic conference in 2018 with Hip Hop pioneer and legendary b-boy Clemente “Kid Freeze” Moreno. He is famous for being one of the first to do the continuous head spin. We were on a panel together, but we also attended other sessions and plenaries at the conference. Routinely he would point out inaccurate statements made by presenters. I am not referring to graduate students who were still working out their arguments, rather tenured professors who are supposedly knowledgeable and well established in the field. His insight provided the necessary critique that is present throughout Hip Hop that we truly need in Hip Hop studies. We need real Hip Hoppas in the culture to hold Hip Hop studies accountable. Academics have written and can continue to publish and teach without any consequences while numerous Hip Hoppas struggle just to make it. No longer shall academics continue to eat off subpar work while b-boys/b-girls, deejays, graffiti artists and rappers put in blood, sweat, and tears just to eat. Hip Hop studies must be held accountable and to the right standard.

Our last suggestion for moving the field forward is to produce work that is connected to the culture. We are calling this “that Hip Hop feel.” If you quickly read Marcus Smalls’ review “Clan in Da Front - Wu-Tang: An American Saga Review,” you will see what we mean.\textsuperscript{51} We hope that Hip Hop scholars publish dope work and JHHS aims to put out dynamic, vibing, and hitting Hip Hop scholarship that Hip Hop can rock with. We recognize our primary audience is academia, but we also want to reach the culture. If a b-girl/b-boy, deejay, or Hip Hop head pick up one of our essays, we want

\textsuperscript{50} Chang, Total Chaos, 31.

them to respond by saying “That’s fire.” If they cannot rock with it, then we need to do better.

All the articles contained in this issue push the boundaries of Hip Hop studies in directions hitherto uncharted and, perhaps most importantly, create new lanes for further study that will ultimately transform the field in ways that only true lovers of hip hop can generate. While they each respect and cite the seminal texts and research that has marked the field, they are also unafraid to chart new territory. Anwar Uhuru’s “‘Imbedded’ Belonging and Black Being: A Critical Analysis of Hip Hop Beingness in Kendrick Lamar’s 2016 Grammy Awards Performance” invites readers to consider “performance” as a means by which rappers convey meaning. Not only is this useful in helping us get past the predominance of lyrical analysis, but it also opens the doors for scholars of hip hop to consider performance in other hip hop arenas (e.g. battle rap, freestyle ciphers, etc). In the specific case of Kendrick Lamar, Uhuru details how Kendrick’s performance in 2016 is a commentary on the perception of the black body in the United States.

Leah Tonnette Gaines’s article on 2Pac, entitled “This Ain’t Just a Rap Song: 2Pac, Sociopolitical Realities, and Hip Hop Nation Language,” pushes past the exhausted method of lyrical analysis by incorporating Hip Hop Nation Language as a framework. In doing so, Gaines can get us closer to how 2Pac intended his music to be received as opposed to offering a lyrical analysis that is based on aesthetic concepts unconnected to hip hop culture. Gaines’s article opens the doors for further research into rap music that centralizes the rapper’s agency in determining the message of their music.

Pyar Seth’s, Carlton Keith Harrison’s, and Jasmyn Mackell’s article entitled “Grinding All My Life: Nipsey Hussle, Community Health, and Care Ethics” as well as Brittany Lee Long’s “Hustle in H-Town: Hip Hop Entrepreneurialism in Houston” are similar in that they arguably break entirely new ground in their treatment of rappers as community health organizers and as entrepreneurs respectively. This is incredibly valuable work because it allows us to move past rap music as the central focus of Hip Hop studies. In particular, it allows us to view Hip Hop not only as a noun that references an African diasporic phenomenon, but also as an adjective that describes, among other things, the nature of one’s relationship to their own community. In other words, there is something very “Hip Hop” about serving one’s community and this is an idea that warrants deeper investigation.

Following the publication of this volume nine, our goal is to do it big for volume ten. Our hope is that volume 10 will unlock the full potential of Hip Hop studies and move the entire field forward. This volume will consist of an innovative and interactive publication. All the “articles” will bring Hip Hop to life and include live videos, songs, deejay mixes and potentially curated graffiti pieces. Hip Hop scholarship is hindered by the text based medium. To fully understand Hip Hop, we need to both see the b-girl and listen to or read the explanation of their dance. When it comes to emcees, we can get a fuller understanding of their songs by going through the whole recording process, discovering why they chose that beat, finding out what did they mean by their lyrics,
discovering who they want to reach with that song, and learning how their music fit in with the overall work. The successful implementation of a completely digital, interactive and 4D publication will transform how we publish and understand Hip Hop.

**Answering Ancestral Call**

The question that lies before us, amid these waves of oppression, is how are we going to respond? Since Hip Hop is more than music, how will we incorporate all the elements and characteristics that make up Hip Hop in our responses? “Hip Hop Future” envisions a new direction for Hip Hop Studies and challenges scholars to take a faith filled and sacrificial step onto their path of ancestral voices that have carried us this far. We do not need another lyrical analysis of DMX’s “Slippin” or surface level examination of Megan Thee Stallion’s role in Hip Hop.

Hip Hop Studies must step up and fulfill its role in the academy to fight systemic oppression and empower the most vulnerable within the academy. The goal then should be as the most vulnerable are emboldened, whether they are students, or Black and Brown faculty, they can then “fight the power” in their scholarly and local communities. The last step also entails a new way of doing Hip Hop scholarship. Let us decolonize our text, remix our scholarly works and create innovative and interactive scholarly pieces that entail audio, video, and dope aesthetics.

Surrounded by these great clouds of witnesses, we feel both an urgency and weightiness to ensure that we do justice to our Hip Hop ancestors and step into our ancestral path. Toni Morrison dedicated Beloved to “Sixty million and more.” This represents black people who lost their lives during the Transatlantic slave trade. They are not forgotten and live on in the African Diaspora today. As discussed in this introduction, Hip Hop is an African diasporic phenomenon that represents knowledge of self, community, and justice. Hip hop culture, as well as the scholarship it produces, must connect to our ancestors and give a voice to the sixty million and more. The *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* produces scholarship that celebrates and memorializes our ancestors.

If academics want to study Hip Hop, then they should care about the conditions of black people, and by extension, our ancestors, as Hip Hop cannot be divorced from its African essence. Utilizing a Hip Hop methodological framework is one that recognizes black people's crucial contributions to the culture. It is important that academics interrogate their own subject positions when studying Hip Hop. Ask yourself what your relationship is to the lyrics you quote, the people you interview, and the scholars you cite. Knowledge of self includes knowledge of one's scholarly self, communal self, and spiritual self. Acknowledge one's privileges and oppressions and interrogate who you are in relation to your scholarship.

Since community is a foundational tenet of Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop scholarship does not only take place in the Ivory Tower, and Hip Hoppers must find each other,
regardless of where they are located. Academia does not have a monopoly on Hip Hop scholarship, and connections should be made inside and outside of the Ivory Tower. Hip Hop scholars, no matter where they are, must always remember that this is a community built on trust, knowledge, and democracy. Please do not be the person who writes about black rappers and then implicitly discriminates against black people. As the African proverb says, “If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.”

JHHS cares about producing strong, innovative Hip Hop scholarship, and we welcome submissions that incorporate all elements of Hip Hop. We welcome graffiti, paintings, digital humanities, audio pieces, and innovative pieces that academia has never seen before. While we also welcome traditional scholarly journal articles, don't be afraid to work within and across different interactive and multimodal genres. A.D. Carson and many other academics have submitted their dissertations as rap albums, and this is the type of scholarship we will showcase. If you see a breakin battle and you want to respond with a graffiti inspired painting, that is fine. If you experience excellent deejaying at a party and you want to respond with rap lyrics, please do so. We recognize that sometimes, the traditional scholarly journal article genre does not capture the feelings, intensity, and creativity that a song, picture, or dance might. Our ancestors might guide you towards another genre, and it is important to listen to, and follow, their guidance.
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Anwar Uhuru

This article argues that in a space of artistic performance Black people can fully imbed themselves in the space, despite the temporality of the performance itself. Therefore, in the act of performing, Black people are able to fully be recognized as a human whole. The goal of this article is to think of a Hip Hop beingness that fuses the temporal/body, consciousness/beyond the body, and the ancestral connections of orality and genetic memory. I do so by looking at how black performance disrupts dominant narratives of black bodies as being just flesh. This article brings together, Hip Hop studies, Africana philosophy and performance theory to argue that the space of performativity moves beyond the notion of blackness as void and does not solely focus on the constraints of corporeal blackness. Instead, the black body imbeds the space it occupies. In doing so, it disrupts and reconfigures space, time, and narratives of belonging.

Introduction

In his article, “Can It Be Bigger than Hip Hop?: From Global Hip Hop Studies to Hip Hop,” Travis Harris states, “there is no uniform perspective on what ‘real Hip Hop’ is, it is clear that real Hip Hop is deeper than what is easily identifiable on the surface.” As a Black existential philosopher, I approach Hip Hop as another lens to think of Black existentialism, which is defined as a philosophical methodology that “critiques domination and affirms the empowerment of Black people in the world.” To concretize the discussion further, I am looking at the philosophical ruminations that Hip Hop provides. As Harris notes, “real Hip Hop is more than what is being played on the radio and television, trending on YouTube, at the top of the iTunes chart, or hot on Tidal.”

Moving beyond the temporal response to Hip Hop, which is the sonic, the visual, the economic mobility, the fashion, and the bravado in performance and vernacular as well as the local representations in conversation with and deviating from the global response, it is rich with philosophical inquiry and how marginalized communities do philosophy.

Thinking within and beyond the context of American society, the perception of the Black body is one that is imbedded in a space that is centered on both discourse and meaning. The non-anchored, Black body is suspended from a space that is simultaneously made apart from the whole while also being made a central point of attention. From this perspective, the Black body is a ‘floating body’ that “lacks form or

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3 Harris, “Can It Be Bigger than Hip Hop?,” 18.
placement within a political/ontological landscape.”

But performance theorists such as Harvey Young, Thomas DeFrantz, and E. Patrick Johnson have discussed in detail that Blackness in the realm of performance moves beyond a static stasis of a floating body by being grounded within the space of performance. By grounding the Black body through an analysis of performance, this article argues that performance disrupts whether Black bodies are, or are not, a part of what constitutes a human being. I do so by looking at how Black performance disrupts white temporal narratives as the performativity moves beyond the notion of Blackness as void and does not solely focus on the constraints of corporeal Blackness. Instead, the Black body imbeds the space it occupies. In doing so, it disrupts and reconfigures space, time, and narratives of belonging. In a space of artistic performance African Americans can fully imbed themselves in the space, despite the temporality of the performance itself, and therefore in the act of performing, African Americans are able to fully be recognized as a human whole. The goal of this article is to think of a Hip Hop beingness that fuses the temporal/body, consciousness/beyond the body, and the ancestral connections of orality and genetic memory.

**Genealogy of Difference**

To fully contend with this, we need to go back to a genealogy of difference on this side of the Atlantic and must incorporate a greater context of the Middle Passage, Slavery, and Citizenship. If we are to move beyond the narratology of a history of enslavement, then we must interrogate the carceralty of non-white bodies. The analysis then becomes an existential conversation of imprisonment within and outside of the longer prison industrial complex. Ironically, it becomes a circuitous exercise in which we are back to the discussions of the materiality of difference. The difference being that racialized Black bodies are erased from being a part of normative discourses of citizenship, justice, and humanism. This is clearly seen in well-known examples of popular culture. On February 15, 2016, Kendrick Lamar delivered an explosive six-minute performance of excerpts of his album *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Critically acclaimed and lauded, spectators were left wondering, “what will he do?” He opened his performance with the song “The Blacker the Berry,” on a set where the stage is made to look like the inside of a prison. It is complete with bars and cells and the sounds of horns playing. Lamar enters center stage wearing a state prison uniform and walking in a line hand- and ankle-cuffed to the men who are in line with him. Not only are these men a visual reminder of the Prison Industrial Complex, but they force the audience to retrace images of men being shackled together while boarding ships during the Middle Passage. By critiquing the Prison Industrial Complex, Lamar forces the audience to bear witness to the fact that African Americans are only 12% of the U.S. adult population but make up 40% of the prison population.

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Lamar’s performance continues as he recites his lyrics into a microphone, and he is able to remove the shackles but not his uniform. He transitions to the song “Alright.” The lights darken, revealing luminescent paint that appears on his uniform and that of the other prisoners. The scene is like the dream sequence in the Broadway musical Fela. The transition is complete with drum rhythms and chants of “we gone be alright.” The djembe drummers and dancers form a circle around him as a bonfire appears and Lamar continues his verse by incorporating this African diasporic phenomenon. Arguably, Lamar’s incorporation of live drums, chanting, dancing around a bonfire is an homage to when drumming was banned in the Pre-United States Colonies. In 1740, the South Carolina slave code laws became the basis of the slave code Laws of the United States. An excerpt of article 36 states: “[U]sing or keeping drums, horns or other loud instruments, which may call together or give sign or notice to one another of their wicked designs and purposes.”

The drums which are the heartbeat of a culture as well as the bells, and horns that accompany them were the sonic deadening of African oral culture in what would become the United States. However, Black resilience does not end with the banishment of drums and horns and “other loud instruments.” The covert methods of preservation are overlooked by the overt examples that are visible in Caribbean, Central, and South American and African diasporic culture that were allowed to retain drums and other instruments. The erasure of the non-verbal sound of those of African descent who were both free and enslaved is to eradicate the being and belonging that is outside of a white power structure. The significance of the legal silencing of Black sound is that it continues to serve as the silence and erasure of a discourse on Black being, belonging and imbeddedness, which is why Blackness can only be measured through the continual performances of Blackness because Black being-ness is temporal.

The music video to “Alright” ends with Lamar suspended in air until a white uniformed police officer forms his hand into the shape of a gun and the sound of a bullet fires and Lamar falls to the ground. The audience is left to assume that Lamar is profiled and killed because he is Black. Lamar’s Grammy Award performance of the song goes beyond an observation of racial and classed violence against unarmed Black youth. Instead of ending his performance like he does in his music video, he walks to a section of the stage that is lit with a single spotlight illuminating a microphone attached to a stand. Lamar then delivers his next song, which is a new track that is a reflection on capitalism, violence, and systemic oppression. Then the lights fade and reveal a projection of an outline of Africa. Within that outline the word “Compton” appears. The location of the word “Compton” is of note. It appears towards the western edge of the outline. Compton, California is Kendrick Lamar’s hometown, and it is the place in which

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5 Gov. William Bull ratified the document. The original document of the 1740 South Carolina Slave Code, Acts of the South Carolina General Assembly, 1740 # 670, is housed in the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, which is in Columbia, South Carolina.

6 1740 South Carolina Slave Code, Article 36.
Black being and imbeddedness is erased due to poverty and poverty-related crime that contributes to the mass incarceration of Black bodies.

The placement of the word “Compton” specifically signifies the location in Africa where many people were captured and subsequently enslaved during the transatlantic slave trade. The stage lights fade to dark, and the camera immediately repositions to the audience, their faces revealing signs of shock and awe. Lamar’s performance broke barriers of art, by infusing his embodiment of Blackness while performing at an awards show. He forces his audience to take in both his performance and how he embodies and imbeds his Blackness. The program then goes to a commercial break. In a racist context to be Black is not just a phenotypical marker but a signifier of being below. Kendrick’s performance is a reminder to Black people that their Black skin is a reminder of forced migration but also a temporal symbol of their lack of political agency. Blackness and political agency can only be approached through the aesthetic contributions found in art, music, literature, and fashion. Consequently, Black Americans have no sustainable political agency because of institutional sanctions that produce and promote anti-Blackness.

Enmeshing Hip Hop, Performance and African Diaspora Culture

In their June 2017 lecture “Creolizing Theory,” Jane A. Gordon and Michael Monahan argue that the main issues that arise in American Africana-Afrocentrist theory is an “embedded belongingness that creates a primary, legitimate, and informed perspective.” This means that the descendants of the transatlantic slave trade who are now categorized as theoretical “natives” to the United States, grapple with the concept of belonging and having legitimate claims to an informed perspective of African culture, tradition, and orality. For example, music, food, oral lore, and spiritual practices are ways in which one can trace the African and Indigenous ancestral memory within Black American culture. However, the embrace and claim of these traditions is fraught with tension both within and between what it means to claim lineage to the continent of Africa while also being part of the naturalized citizenry of the United States. According to D. Soyini Madison, Black performance theory (or BPT) “helps us decipher these imperatives of Blackness.” Soyini-Madison defines deciphering performance theory as working through:

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8 The use of “native” is in correlation to Richard Wright in his novel Native Son, which I argue is being imbedded in a culture that is otherized but not ancestrally indigenous to North America/US. Furthers the thesis of imbeddedness. Richard Wright, Native Son: A Novel (1940; New York: McClelland and Stewart, 2022).
meanings of Blackness by excavating the enlivening enactments that sustain Blackness; theory does the labor of translating the thick ontologies of what Black imperatives are by locating them within the generative forces of performance. With each generation, perhaps with each turn of a phrase, we stake a new claim within a new world order for the nature and significance of Blackness. Black performance theory complicates old claims of Blackness, because life is change and the world keeps turning, demanding new vocabularies and new actions.9

How do Black Americans establish being and belongingness when their performance and artistic expression are merely seen as just a performance of Black culture? How does that performance of artistic expression inform the ways in which Black Americans continue to form modes of resistance in the post-Obama era which is now referred to as the “Age of Trump”? To begin to answer these questions I go back to Harris’s intervention; he uses the work of both Pough and KRS one, invoking a “collective consciousness” or “state of mind.”10 Harris further articulates a belongingness or a Hip Hop beingness by stating,

Since Hip Hop is an African diasporic phenomenon, KRS’ collective consciousness and Pough’s belief that Hip Hop is a way of life becomes clearer. I intentionally use the term “phenomenon,” instead of just aesthetic or culture to make space for them both (aesthetic and culture), and the worldview that comes out of African diasporas. Africa is the birthplace of humanity.11

Moreover, how do Black Americans resist systemic forms of oppression that view artistic expression as entertainment and not as a method of empowerment? This essay argues that Kendrick Lamar’s 2016 performance is a declaration of imbedded belonging and Black being. Lamar’s performance provides a way to think through imbeddedness because his performance is a visual and sonic suspension of time and reality. It is also a suspension of historical and contemporary constructions of Black humanity and gender, despite the fact that Kendrick Lamar is a male performer (and as scholars have noted male performers are often center when women, gender and sexual minorities remain in the periphery).12

Lamar’s performance is not just a moment in time on a televised stage that suspends reality— it declares Black being and an imbedded belongingness. The disruption of space and time occurs because Blackness is counter time and counterspace. Yet Blackness faces a difficulty in being able to fully claim and occupy even that countering. The suspension of time and the sonic suspension of reality, according to Gordon, “produces an ambiguous place because we are approaching history from the perspective of being, which is a fraught and ambiguous place. Consequently, it influences

10 Harris, “Can It Be Bigger than Hip Hop?,” 21.
11 Harris, “Can It Be Bigger than Hip Hop?,” 21.
the present and subsequently the future.”13 I would add that the narrative of history is that of an illusion because it paints a broad brushstroke of inclusivity and blanketed assumptions. Rarely does the narrative include the perspectives from those voices that are marginalized within the dominant narrative. Hence, if we are to look at “being,” and “Black American being” in particular, from the perspective of American philosophy, it rarely includes an analysis of those voices.14 Therefore, this essay proposes that by using the alteration of “imbedded” we can begin to think of Blackness as not something solely defined by chronological narrative. Therefore, we can begin to move past the issues of superimposed meanings from teleological understandings.

This issue of traditional narrative creating meaning, and the problems it poses to Black being, is seen most clearly in popular understandings of chattel slavery. Although it could be argued that the erasure of the Black body and Black being did begin with the transatlantic slave trade, this is not the only point of origin to derive meaning for the Black body and Black being. Only by using a concept such as “imbedded,” which simultaneously grounds meaning in a specific moment of performance while also highlighting the disruption of that chronology, can we begin to have a method to see specific moments in time as important to the creation of Blackness without assuming that those specific moments contain all meaning in a determined teleology.

Black being and being apart is the interrogation of not only structures outside, but also within, racialized non-white communities which are defined, typically, by what whiteness excludes. In using Zack’s argument on the problems of the theory of teleology as it relates to imbeddedness, we see why belonging cannot be achieved if the status quo prevails. Black being and imbeddedness can only be defined through the notion of being stacked against the United States Declaration of Independence’s motto of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and therefore counter to most dominant narratives.

The Politics of Black Being

Frank B. Wilderson III argues that “the aporia between Black-being and political ontology has existed since the Arab and subsequently the European enslavement of Africans.”15 Black-being and political ontology are oxymoronic because to acknowledge Black being or being Black is political, and it empowers Black being-ness. Because Black being and political resistance as the agency that lends power to Black being contradict and undermine regimes that seek to repress Black being, oppressive regimes must attempt to eradicate and vilify Black being and resistance through evolving methodologies of anti-Blackness. Wilderson continues by stating, “the need to craft an

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13 Gordon and Monahan, “Creolizing Theory.”
ensemble of questions through which to arrive at an unflinching paradigmatic analysis of political ontology is repeatedly thwarted in its attempts to find a language that can express the violence of *slave-making*, a violence that is both structural and performative.”16 For Wilderson, *slave-making* is not just how the plantation and being forced onto ships during the Middle Passage institutionalized imagery of what Blackness and enslavement mean. Instead, it is how the narrative of *slave-making* replicates itself to manufacture enslaved persons in the twenty-first century. How are Black Americans with the legacy of institutionalized slavery and now institutionalized incarceration going to contemplate Black imbedded belonging and states of being? In thinking of Black beingness from the perspective of eradicating a slave-making ideology, Black being, and imbedded belonging cannot simply be an imaginative theory. It is a theory that requires an active praxis due to Black beingness and imbeddedness not fully existing in American conceptions of chronological development. At best, Black being is a floating signifier. Therefore, beingness is the ability to experience life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Those three words are the alleged Genesis of American ontology. Moreover, how can Black bodies respond to this when the 13th, 14th, 15th and 19th Amendments cannot undo the undoing of slave-making? If beings who are Black are a part of the United States, that would mean that the United States has to acknowledge that the 13th Amendment was supposed to end slavery but actually redefined it in the form of incarceration. That would also mean acknowledging that the 14th Amendment, which grants citizenship to all born and naturalized in the United States, and the 15th, which grants citizenship regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, did so to counter a preexisting and well-established chronology of American development. Far from being “natural” outgrowths of American promise, these amendments are correctives to a problem with a chronology. Hence, the Black body, and marginalized identities in general, are forced to imbed themselves in a normative line of development. And this is all complicated further by the historical fact that Civil Rights in the US have never been a progressive teleology but instead a back-and-forth over various states of oppression—discrimination and erasure of citizenship occurred even further due to the failure of the Reconstruction Era, the decision of Plessy v Ferguson, and the ongoing fight to enact further Civil Rights Acts that extends to the modern period.17

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17 Civil Rights Act of 1866, extending the rights of emancipated slaves by stating that any person born in the United States regardless of race is a US citizen.
   Civil Rights Act of 1871, prohibiting race-based violence against African Americans (see also, Enforcement Acts which were three Acts in 1870-1871).
   Civil Rights Act of 1875, prohibiting discrimination in "public accommodations", which was found unconstitutional in 1883 as Congress could not regulate conduct of individuals.
   Civil Rights Act of 1957, establishing the Civil Rights Commission.
   Civil Rights Act of 1960, establishing federal inspection of local voter registration polls.
Not only are (cis)gendered heteronormative white men and women responding with “All Lives Matter” and “Health Care is a Privilege” but women of color (presumably heteronormative) are responding with the same rhetoric. For example, during the question-and-answer round of the 2017 Miss USA competition, when Kára McCullough was asked, “Is health care a basic right or a privilege?,” she responded that it is a “privilege because as a government employee I have the privilege of receiving health care because I work and those that work should receive health care which proves we not only need healthcare but jobs.” When asked if they had ever attended any BLM rallies, recording artist Rozonda Thomas (Chili) from the music group TLC and band member Tionne Watkins (T-Boz) both said no, and Thomas responded with “all lives matter.” Ironically, unlike The Miss America pageant, The Miss USA pageant is not a scholarship competition. Instead of being awarded a scholarship, Miss USA contestants not only compete to win the title of Miss USA, but they are also eligible to compete for the Miss Universe pageant. Instead of being judged by intellectual merit, the contestants are judged by their ability to wear a swimsuit, which is the ability to be assessed largely on their perceived physical beauty.

The judges for the 2017 preliminary rounds for the Miss USA competition were Halima Aden– Somali-American model and first woman to compete in a Miss USA state pageant wearing a hijab and burkini; Maura McGreevy – IMG corporate community (IMG for entertainers and models); Carole Gist – Miss USA 1990, Miss USA 1990; Nancy Lublin – CEO of Crisis Text Line and creator of Dress for Success; Brooke Lee – Miss USA 1997, and Miss Universe 1997; Nick Light – vice president of Sony Music and Warner Bros. Records; and Vanessa Gringer – director of business development at IMG (IMG

Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin by federal and state governments as well as some public places.

Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibiting discrimination in sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, creed, and national origin.

Civil Rights Act of 1990, would have made it easier for plaintiffs to win civil rights cases; was vetoed by President George H. W. Bush.

Civil Rights Act of 1991, providing the right to trial by jury on discrimination claims and introducing the possibility of emotional distress damages, while limiting the amount that a jury could award.


Models). The judges for the 2017 Miss USA finals were Halima Aden– Somali-American model and first woman to compete in a Miss USA state pageant wearing a hijab and burkini, Carson Kressley – TV personality, style expert, fashion designer and author, Brook Lee– Miss USA 1997 and Miss Universe 1997, Nancy Lublin – Founder of Dress for Success, Jeannie Mai– Style expert, philanthropist, and co-host of The Real and Janet Mock – Author, television host and advocate. McCullough’s inability to answer the question with either empathy, inclusion, or imbedded notions of Blackness did not cost her the crown — it solidified that she would win it. McCullough’s answer is her ability to convey to the judges that she is not a being imbedded in Blackness and empathy. Those who served as judges for the preliminaries and finals only solidified that McCullough needed to demonstrate her ability to perform an image of not imbedding herself in her Blackness because they too are representations of capitalist corporate consumption. Rozonda Thomas’s statement that “All Lives Matter,” is another example of having the ability to not be imbedded in Blackness. Instead of stating “when Black Lives Matter All Lives will matter” she stated, “All Lives Matter.” It is because of her inability to imbed her Blackness in mattering with Black being and against dominant narratives of white supremacy.

Currently, the divide between margin and center on the aspect of Black imbedded belonging is not just those that are phenotypically, economically, or normatively in power. It is also reinforced by those who are historically and contemporarily in the liminal space of both margin and center. What does it mean for those who have economically attained a level of centrality to negotiate that space when they have been forced to occupy the space in the margins? What does this mean not only in popular spheres but for those who vacillate between academe and the world outside of academe? The question however is not to say that those who do live in a silo are absolved of events that happen outside of academe. Instead, critically engaged scholars are confronted with having to acknowledge and work through the world outside seeping into the world inside of academe. Yet, if Black being and being apart is not desirable or good then there is no desire to imbed Black bodies because it is the reason why Black being and imbeddedness is not equally executed because Black imbedded belongingness is not a part of the discourse on being.

During her speech at the 2017 Women’s March held in Washington, D.C. Angela Y. Davis stated, “history cannot be deleted like web pages.” 20 Her statement was meant to centralize the current moment of rebellion and protest to unify and unite women in particular and oppressed people in general. The impetus of the march was meant to be a protest against the switch from an illusory inclusivity of the Obama administration to the advent of the racist, sexist, and fascist rhetoric of the newly inaugurated Donald J. Trump’s administration. In particular, the Women’s March was meant to unify women in a time in which they thought they would be celebrating the inauguration of the first

20 There were numerous marches held globally as a protest against the inauguration of the 45th president of the United States.
female president. Unfortunately, the United States has yet to experience the election and inauguration of a female president. The 2016 presidential election is an example of how being and imbedding functions through white performances of normative inclusion. Because to exercise normative inclusion threatens white survival and power. Consequently, that fear of white erasure excludes intersectional progression. Therefore, to retain power, which appears as employment, healthcare, home ownership, and citizenship, means that voting for a candidate like Donald J. Trump is plausible. Operating from the fear of erasure is why whiteness enacts the ability to make marginalized groups to not be a part of the larger whole. Not being a part of the broader chronological context is why the rhetoric of xenophobia in the form of anti-immigrant rhetoric, racial tension in the forms of protests, and the regression on rights and privileges regarding gender, were palpable during the 2016 presidential election. The idea of voting against “progressive” modality in the form of being a more inclusive society is one way that voters who benefit from white privilege could recoup and retain power which appears as white supremacy and patriarchy. Ironically, fifty-three percent of those who voted for Donald J. Trump were not poor white males from Appalachia, but instead, they were white women. Out of the 53% of the white women who voted for Trump, 45% of those white women were college-educated. Their votes are not an excuse to ignore the white men and others who believe in retaining white male supremacy that voted for Trump. Instead, the inclusion of voting percentages of white women voters merely highlights that despite the fact that during Trump’s presidential campaign his rhetoric and subsequent behavior incited hate in the hearts, psyche, voice, and action of his supporters which empowered people to vote to protect whiteness.

**Black Beingness and Hip Hop Beingness**

To contemplate this mode of slave-making, and the erasure of beingness and Blackness, we can further interrogate Blackness in America by seeing contemporary portrayals in popular culture. In the television series *American Gods* in the episode “The Secret of Spoon,” the story opens with a scene entitled, “Coming to America 1692.” People who are enslaved and bound to America aboard a Dutch-owned slave ship confront their terrifying situation. One of the men prays to the African trickster God Anansi, or “Mr. Nancy,” as a means for help. Much to the man’s amazement, the God appears in the flesh, clad in a plaid purple suit. The praying man laments that he cannot find his mother. He is totally unaware that he is a person enroute to America via the Middle Passage, and therefore does not understand the broader historical implications. In fact, not only is he afraid because he cannot find his mother and does not even fully understand why he is in chains. Mr. Nancy, played by Orlando Jones, tells the man that his mother is dead for refusing sex to one of their enslavers and that the white men have thrown her overboard. He says she died because she did not know how to swim, and that

people should learn how because it is an awful stereotype. As the men beg to be freed from their chains by Anansi, he starts to tell them what they should expect for themselves and their predecessors. “Once upon a time, a man got fucked,” he begins. “Now, how is that for a story? ‘Cause that’s the story of Black people in America.” He grins impishly at the people’s blank expressions, then remembers: “Shit! You all don’t know you Black yet. You think you just people. Let me be the first to tell you that you are all Black. The moment these Dutch motherfuckers set foot here and decided that they white and you all get to be Black—and that’s the nice name they call you? Let me paint a picture of what’s waiting for you on the shore … You arrive in America, land of opportunity, milk and honey,” he tells them. “And guess what?” You all get to be slaves. Split up, sold off and worked to death. The lucky ones get Sunday off to sleep and fuck and make more slaves. And all for what? For cotton? For indigo? For a fucking purple shirt?”

There is a silver lining, he adds, “The tobacco your grandkids are gonna farm for free is gonna give a shitload of these white motherfuckers cancer.” He explains that the perpetuity of racism will follow them even after slavery is abolished. “A hundred years later, you are fucked,” he continues. “A hundred years after that, fucked. A hundred years after you get free, you’re still getting fucked outta jobs and shot at by police. You see what I’m saying?” Most of the men on the ship, while shocked, are soon teeming with rage. And that’s exactly what Anansi wants. “Anger is good,” Mr. Nancy says, pleased. “Anger gets shit done.” Mr. Nancy/Anansi frees the men from their shackles, and they set the ship on fire — dooming themselves and the ship’s men in the process. The lone survivor of the wreckage is a spider, Anansi’s godly form, who then floats on a wooden plank to America’s shores.

The use of a trickster figure to be freed from bondage is a bold move for retelling the story of enslavement, racism, and contemporary violence and dispossession of Black bodies. However, the role of the trickster is to disrupt normative behaviors and ideologies. Anansi is necessary to answer how does Black being become a part of the discourse of American humanity? It must go back to when one group decided to be called white and call the other group of people Black. Going back to that origin and fast forwarding it to 300 and counting years of Black subjugation it can give an answer to the following question. The main question for many especially Black Americans was who would succeed the first Black President Barack H. Obama? On the eve of the presidential election of Donald J. Trump, in a response to the state of American democracy and Black imbedded belongingness, recording artist Kendrick Lamar used his platform to talk about the state of Black lives. His performance sonically and visually went beyond the suspension of time and sonic reality and is a protest of the political state of Black Americans. Lamar performed songs that were seamlessly spliced together from his 2015 album To Pimp a Butterfly. As previously mentioned, the historical legacy of the legal removal of sound and performance is the removal of imbedded belongingness. Therefore, Lamar’s visual performance is not a moment of protest but is a declaration of imbedded belongingness. By privileging Hip Hop as his preferred genre of music, Lamar highlights
Hip Hop as the recuperative genre of music that preserves and archives the orality of Black Americans. The archival and performative duality that is Hip Hop music is itself an active art form that solidifies Black imbedded belongingness.

Racial division is one way to practice dominance and impose isolation on those who are socially and politically marginalized in an attempt to prevent them from gaining agency and centrality. This is not to ignore the internal issues of difference based on gender, sexuality, age, or ableism. By thinking how Black imbedded-ness and belong are differences within and between the dominant forces that work to continue to marginalize and ostracize those that are not in positions of authority and power. I argue that a discourse on imbedded-ness and belongingness is ontological in scope but ethical in execution and implementation. The field of ethics encompasses a range of approaches in understanding how, why, and to what degree a person or society places value on how one will experience imbedded belonging. It can only be justified when the subject or subjects in power places value on how objects and subjects will guarantee a belonging to and imbedded in the fabric of society. At its most basic level there is a difference between morality and natural goods, which then begs the question what is and is not an object or what is and is not a human that acquires the level of being valued as human. Circuiting to the figure of the trickster (Mr. Nancy/Anansi) and the disruption and time and space through performance (Kendrick Lamar) rewrites the discourse on imbedded belongingness and Black being. What happened to the deities of Africa when Africans who were enslaved were brought over? Anansi is often referred to as Aunt Nancy in Black American South oral folklore. As stated previously, Lamar uses Hip Hop, which is a form of poetry that connects to the Griot (oral folklorists) of West Africa. Rewriting how society places value on humans within American society is rewriting how Blackness is imbedded within the normative discourse. This is not to ignore the ways in which materiality impacts what is and isn’t of value. My aim is to move beyond a dialectic of sympathy that only further marginalizes Black being and instead make Black being and belonging a moral obligation and responsibility of those in positions of power in that it imbeds Black bodies.

Sympathy as Martha Nussbaum and other value theorists argue merely differentiates complicity. For example, sympathy is the act of stating “that must be awful!” However, empathy goes beyond an implication of “that is awful.” Because the person who is expressing empathy believes it to be so, empathy takes on the responsibility of discomfort and injustice and fosters a notion of action. Writing about

and articulating injustice is the way in which writers and thinkers of the period can take on the moral responsibility of contemplating the varying degrees of value placed upon racialized subjects. Therefore, moving beyond being “sympathetic” to discourses on Black being, it is the responsibility of those in power to allow Black beings to belong and become imbedded.

An articulation of variance in value does not negate or dissolve the intricacies of privilege and the participation in oppression of those who are white or of European descent. Instead, it is a way to see the complication of race, empire, gender, and hierarchy that exists within the time in which these texts were written. The intersections of these markers are with us today and it informs how we value those who are deemed racially other. Racially other are those who are not phenotypically seen as white or of European descent. Those differences transition from countries often marked by linguistic and cultural differences to that of skin color. No longer are people described as belonging to a tribe or country but as being Black, white, red, or yellow. The linguistic categories that are ascribed to skin color are categorized in what becomes Webster’s dictionary, which becomes the American dictionary and the etymological guidebook to race. The etymology of race is the way in which non-white beings are valued as being physically, intellectually and politically inferior to those who are white. The topic of race in its design is that of intersectionality. A raced body is valued as that which precedes the difference in gender, class or sexual orientation because the perception of skin color historically and in contemporary discourse regulates the value of an entire group of people.

Black being and imbeddedness gestures towards an articulation of defining race within and between spaces of dominant discourse. It not only allows us to acknowledge resistance within and between the margins but also the notion of decentering the center. The question of centrality creates a discourse that not only demands what is deemed central and marginal but determines how we define centrality. By revisiting the ways that we currently define differences regarding race, class, gender, and ability, we can consider the chronology in which the conversation on these topics emerged in the dominant discourse. In redefining and reimagining the chronology we can also interrogate overt and covert modes of resistance. Arguably, it is necessary to look at value theory instead of focusing on the theory of value, which would simply reinscribe the mere materiality of things. In using marginality, I am aware of the ways in which it is not a stagnant concept but fluid because it has an intra- and intersubjectivity when discussing humans who are autonomous versus the objectification that humans encounter within and between communities that work within, between, and against power structures. Those who are deemed marginal and central continue to navigate the liminal aspects of agency that can create multiple levels of being, belonging, and imbeddedness.
This is not a rhetorical strategy to recruit the use of intersectionality because as Naomi Zack\textsuperscript{25} has argued intersectionality does not address the struggles between and within groups of marginalized people. Instead, it only names the problem and reifies the confines of difference. Nor do I think that a discourse on what Zack calls “critical plunder” fully articulates the multiple and complex issues of colonialization. Instead, an examination of the difference in value and the lack of value that is given to the multiple layers of marginalized and ostracized persons is necessary. An analysis of imbedded-ness and belonging is not a catch-all solution that will solve the problems of humanity. Instead, it will raise more questions because those who deeply interrogate these differences will see the liminality of language.

In his prolific body of work, Lewis Gordon places great emphasis on the limitations and restrictions that etymology has on the marked subject. If we are to look at non-white non-normative subjects, what part of their lives are and are not the byproduct of a performance of their difference? Yet, where do we go from here if we are not willing to deal with the messiness of all the things that constitute what it means to not fit into a one size fits all mold of what it means to be oppressed? The materiality of difference is the ability to acknowledge being and belonging beyond not only those in power, but also those who do not yet have power. Materiality in this argument is to acknowledge embodiment and inhabitation of a being. Before one is acknowledged as a being their materiality must be acknowledged and treated as being imbedded within the discourse. Until then, the materiality of difference will never be actualized or imbedded in the discourse of belongingness. That is not to ignore the carceral body, the material body, the state of being and, within the discourse of enslavement, the role that enslavement plays in the ways that the carceral system is in the contemporary site of non-being.

Black Being and imbeddedness is a way to contemplate Black being and belonging because it is taken from an ethical and political standpoint. Taken from this standpoint, it creates a counternarrative response against the ravages of colonization, whiteness, and the eradication of any connections to or conversations with the continent of Africa. By not considering the ethical and political standpoint of imbedding Blackness it not only eradicates Black being, but it also simultaneously creates an action of discarding the aspects of the continent that do not merely serve to reenforce power structures. Acknowledging Black being that is imbedded would empower counter movements who want to abolish oppressive power structures. It causes critical thinkers, as bell hooks notes, to do the “internal critique,” which “is essential to any politics of transformation.”\textsuperscript{26} Otherwise, I and others will only work to continue to exercise violence by silencing those that do not fit the comfortable confines of respectability to then at best create a dystopic fantasy of Black being and monstrosity which continues the narrative of Blackness as


\textsuperscript{26} bell hooks, \textit{Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center} (Boston: South End Press, 1984), xiii.
floating bodies. Instead, the goal is to embody a complicated but real state of being in which is obtainable for all.

To do so, would mean that humans who do not operate within the discourse and performance of normative being-ness can live without fear or judgement. It means that those who do not operate within the performatory gestures of academe can still be treated as equal contributors to a liberatory praxis. However, it does not mean that those who chose to operate within academe can only silently acquiesce to dominant power structures. Such a view will A) only reinforce the thing we seek to undo and B) undermines the fact that their presence is a political act of individual and collective agency. Such a vision would mean that it would be the verbal and written notion that there is more ignorance than knowledge or simply put the value of knowing that you don’t know. In that vision of advocating for those that are outside the dominant power structure through new language, it will go beyond only sharing the experiences of difference. Because it will go beyond a narrative of sympathy and will be one of moral obligation and responsibility. By allowing those that are historically and systemically marginalize to be heard and respected it will no longer only be expressed by those who have access and occupancy to normative spaces of power. If that responsibility is not taken by those that currently occupy normative spaces of power, the consequence will be that those who exist outside of that space of discourse and accessibility will never be heard or acknowledged. Access to normative spaces does not dissolve the limitations, complications, and isolating aspects that language itself does to those who are marginalized. Language itself must include Black being and the imbedded belonging that comes with including Black being.

However, the consequences of exclusively focusing on the political and libidinal capital of white male heteronormativity only addresses the intersubjective aspects of human value and Black being and not the intrasubjective aspects of human value and Black being. By placing value between the dominant and non-dominant it ignores how normative and non-normative constructions create dominance and oppression within marginal communities. What happens when those who are socially inferior within the context of whiteness marginalize those within their community? Firstly, it proves that theories of dominance especially that of whiteness can reappear in marginal communities. Second, those that experience marginalization within their marginal community have permission to not feel an allegiance to those in their community. Thirdly, this creates a larger question, namely, does it really mean anything to claim allegiance to a community when most are still operating from the place of non-being and non-imbedded-ness and are thriving? Instead, it only reminds us of the multiple layers of oppression and residual trauma that need to be undone to even constitute a life of imbedded belonging. Or is Black being the problem? Is Black belonging itself a utopic vision that only allows a mere portion of a population to live a full life? Perhaps it is
merely an Americentric rumination of working against living a life free from state-based violence and contrasting it with the materiality of imbedded belonging.27

Whole personhood in American discourse is associated with those who have power. Therefore, those who do not have power are not theorized as a whole person. Hence, Black belonging, and imbedded-ness is not a part of the discourse of American thought, which means Black belonging and imbedded-ness has no materiality. By ignoring the discourse on Black being and imbedded belonging, there will never be a discourse of imbedded belonging that will address the multiplicity of difference. At best it deals with the materiality of those in power who can experience imbeddedness, which is defined as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Consequently, those who do not can never embody nor put into praxis Black being and belonging. Materiality itself, interrogates the value that is placed on the materiality of power and how that power is based on the dependency of those who are marginalized and ostracized within and between marginal communities. Hence, the removal of the materiality of sound is the removal of imbedded belongingness of Black being.

Naomi Zack complicates current discourses on Black being because her definition of teleology articulates the temporality/floating of Black bodies. It impacts the conceivable scope of full citizenry in Kendrick Lamar’s performance. I revisit the initial statement of Naomi Zack by comparing how things are regarding Black being with the way they should be. Everyone should be able to live their lives within the full materiality of being and the opportunity to live by the creed of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet, Black being, and imbedded belonging are not in the discourse of material fullness and discourse. Therefore, the teleology of Blackness is a mistaken conflation. The imbedded belongingness of Kendrick Lamar’s 2016 Grammy Award Performance does what those in a space of non-normativity can do, which is question and suspend moments of othering. It does not solve the issues of marginalization. At best, it only allows us to voyeuristically peruse the lives of Black men, even if it is the jaw-dropping visuals that Lamar provides in his artistry that capture a day in the lives of Black America more broadly and Black men in particular. Nor does it attempt to resolve the intricacies of marginalization. Instead, it leaves the viewer with the question of “Now what?”

Kendrick Lamar’s 2016 performance is a declaration of imbedded belonging and Black being. Lamar’s performance provides a way to think through imbeddedness because his performance is a visual and sonic suspension of time and reality. But more than that, Lamar’s performance goes beyond a moment in time on a televised stage that sonically suspends reality; it declares Black being and an imbedded belongingness. Lamar’s performance is an ethical call to acknowledge the lives of those that are in the margins by asking what actions those in power can take. Because there are no answers or effective actions that can be taken for those who face multiple levels and layers of

27 I see materiality as the physical formation of a whole person.
marginalization. Yet, it does not eradicate the fact that Black communities face varying levels of marginalization within and outside of their fiscal, political, and religious affiliations. Whether it is a reflection on the prison industrial complex, protests, police brutality, and the erasure of Black American belongingness, Black being and imbedded belonging at best will be a utopic mythos that is only obtained by a privileged minority within a marginal community. Yet, if we consider imbedded belonging and how that is obtainable for Black beings through the lens of full materiality which is defined through the American philosophical trope of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that idea will encapsulate the ways in which, through a reimagined discourse, we can collectively and individually revisit what is and is not in conversation with the dominant narrative and ultimately begin to dismantle those ideological structures that are in power.
Bibliography


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Hustle in H-Town: Hip Hop Entrepreneurialism in Houston
Brittany L. Long

Imagine a sprawling, overheated American megalopolis that epitomizes diversity and segregation in one of the world’s youngest countries. Despite Houston’s history of structural racism and segregation, Houston Hip Hop entrepreneurs built communities and created storied businesses that culminate in a sense of local pride and Hip Hop identity that has not been replicated in the same manner in any other city. An examination of thought-provoking existing scholarship about the Hip Hop South and Hip Hop in Houston, as well as an examination of existing and collected primary sources (interviews) allow me to demonstrate two things: Hip Hop entrepreneurialism is a relevant and important foundational element to understanding Hip Hop in Houston and more generally Hip Hop in the South and can contribute to the understanding of Hip Hop globally. Additionally, Houston Hip Hop entrepreneurs continue to run businesses and build communities in direct conversation with the lived experience of identifying as Hip Hop within the city itself. Hip Hop entrepreneurialism in Houston and the Hip Hop South is understudied in the academy and deserves more recognition so that scholars can emphasize the true grit of Hip Hop collectivity.

Introduction

For decades the global conversations around Hip Hop as a field of study have focused too heavily on rap music and lyrical analysis; for example, Hip Hop as resistance (we can hear it in the music), Hip Hop as storytelling (we can see it in music videos), and Hip Hop as an African diasporic phenomenon (we can attempt to trace its history). However, some scholars have added new elements to the conversation. Through examination of existing scholarship on Hip Hop and how it contributes to a collective identity, I build on author and Hip Hop scholar Daniel White Hodge’s assertion that entrepreneurialism is one of the ten foundational elements of Hip Hop. While all or most scholarship on Hip Hop is valid in its own right, the focus has seldom been on the Hip Hop South and the Hip Hop entrepreneurialism that created markets and communities despite Jim Crow and structural racism post-slavery.

A handful of scholars of the Hip Hop South have given a decent amount of credence to, for instance, OutKast’s contribution, the Hip Hop South identity, or contextualizing the Hip Hop South as the third movement or “Third Coast” other in Hip Hop history. The Hip Hop South rose from the peripheries of mainstream Hip Hop, sitting outside of and other to the East/West Coast Hip Hop powerhouses of the 1980s and 1990s. Southern Hip Hoppas were able to circumvent traditional structures and find success outside of mainstream Hip Hop markets despite sociocultural configurations in place preventing entrepreneurs from taking advantage of big-name labels and big-name markets. I contend that the “alienation trope” that Regina N. Bradley refers to in her studies is an understudied element of the Hip Hop South. Southern Hip Hoppas found creativity and community operating outside of the structural boundaries of the norm and what was preconceived as marketable by record label executives. I aim to scratch the
surface in underscoring the Hip Hop entrepreneurial voices of Houston whose perseverance and creativity contributed to the rise of successful Hip Hop businesses in the South and globally. I aim to emphasize the independence, self-reliance, and adaptability of Hip Hop entrepreneurs in the Hip Hop South, and mainly, Hip Hop Houston.

Notably, there is not a complete lack of academic scholarship studying the rise of Hip Hop in Houston. Historian Tyina Steptoe paid historical attention to the rise of Black entrepreneurship through cultural exchange and the merging of Black identities pre- and post-Jim Crow in the city.¹ Other scholars contributing to the Hip Hop Houston conversation have paid critical attention to the ways in which the city of Houston experienced the desecration and bisection of Black communities despite the historical existence of Black-owned businesses and entrepreneurialism in said communities.² Scholars who have contributed to the Hip Hop South conversation point out that the experience of being Black in the South directly relates to why and how Hip Hop rose in various southern cities, understanding that Hip Hop is created in opposition to mainstream Hip Hop success. Houston Hip Hop scholars have successfully accounted for the ways in which Hip Hoppas created space and place for Black and Brown youth to feel seen, heard, and able to participate in authentic communities while speaking their truth to power.³ However, I postulate that examining the perspectives of Houston Hip Hoppas from an entrepreneurial perspective has the ability to contribute to the conversation of what the Hip Hop “hustle” actually entails. Through the investigation of emic perspectives on the matter, I discovered that Houston Hip Hoppas care a great deal about thriving in a way that allows them to stay authentically Houston, and everybody seems to stick around.

Hip Hoppas such as Bun B, Ricky Royal, Paul Wall, MC Wicket Crickett, Hiram Trevino, and Kidricc James, in conversations with various academics, journalists, and yours truly, have allowed me to identify several themes characterizing Hip Hop entrepreneurialism in Houston. First, Houston Hip Hoppas embraced collective identities centering on the rise of DJ Screw in the 1990s, and Screw proved to be an important icon in the community, demonstrating that success could be achieved without

¹ Tyina L. Steptoe, Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

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already having money or obtaining a major record deal in the Hip Hop space. Second, Houston Hip Hoppas who capitalized on the communities consistently pumped money back into local recording studios, businesses, and even non-profits, embracing the southern sensibility of community-building, at times in spite of aspiring to national or international fame. Lastly, Hip Hoppas in Houston are tenacious. They create success on their own, adopting a self-made mentality that has boded well for Black and Brown entrepreneurs in the city for decades. The self-made entrepreneurial mentality allowed Houston Hip Hop to thrive locally until it gained national attention. Hip Hop Houston persists, proving that Houston’s Hip Hop entrepreneurs deserve their true iconic place in conversations about Hip Hop and the Hip Hop South.

**Hip Hop and Hip Hop Entrepreneurialism**

Hip Hop has risen within architectural areas that generate and recreate oppression. Hip Hop “both creates and is created by a distinct social context essential to the development of identity and subjectivity.” Hip Hop is a feeling, a collective identity. Hip Hop has many disparate and diverse dimensions of art and culture, and it is created in direct conversation with our notions of ourselves. According to Paul Connerton, social memory is grounded in social interaction; people create notions of themselves and their communities through action, ritual, and aggregate understandings of their collective predicaments. Collective memory is also necessary for the construction of culture and identity in both the public and private arena. Hip Hop creates and recreates communities that have reciprocal conversations with history and that community’s collective memory and identity. Henri Lefebvre defines social space as both work and product of a distinct social context. We produce and reproduce distinct social spaces for ourselves and our communities through culture. Therefore, Hip Hop collective consciousness is distinct and similar in different urban contexts; from the city to the neighborhood even right down to the streets. Developments in Hip Hop have actively encouraged the emergence of distinct regional identities, allegiances, territorial rivalries, and closer ties to cities and even specific neighborhoods.

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5 Wilkins, “(W)rapped Space,” 7.
Hip Hop is founded on authenticity, which resides in one who has acquired the knowledge that permits one to perform authentically (accurately and genuinely).\textsuperscript{11} Hodge claims that “Hip Hop is an urban subculture that seeks to express a lifestyle, attitude or theology. Rejecting the dominant culture, it seeks to increase social consciousness, cultural awareness and racial pride. Rap music functions as the vehicle by which the cultural messages of Hip Hop are sent, and the industry by which Hip Hop culture is funded and propagated.”\textsuperscript{12} Rap is an economic engine, making some artists and corporations a lot of money and, in Hodge’s words, “Hip hop offers its adherents community and a voice [and] a safe, productive alternative to the streets…. Hip Hop transcends age, political status, socioeconomic status [and] social standings …\textsuperscript{13} Creating an alternative sense of identity through Hip Hop in environments where opportunities lack, Hip Hoppas are, I contend, inevitably entrepreneurial.

In his book \textit{The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs, and a Cultural Theology}, Hodge builds on the four foundational elements of Hip Hop that scholars have used to define Hip Hop for decades: DJing and turntablism, breaking and breakdancing, rapping and emceeing, and graffiti.\textsuperscript{14} Hodge contends that there are six additional foundational elements of Hip Hop, and they are: b-boying, break beats, street knowledge, street language, street fashion, knowledge of God and self, and entrepreneurialism.\textsuperscript{15} Hodge’s explanation of entrepreneurialism as a foundational Hip Hop element is succinct. I include it below:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Hip Hop’s roots are in entrepreneurialism. The culture started as rap artists actively promoted themselves and built loyal followings. Sean Puffy Combs and Jay Z each have their own clothing label, record companies, and recording studios. The self-reliant spirit of Hip Hop is, however, developed within a supportive community.}\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

I postulate that most Hip Hoppas would confirm that they wouldn’t have been able to find success without invoking the support of their communities. Hip Hop entrepreneurs serve and entertain their communities in exchange for their support while representing the community through Hip Hop practice. As Hodge puts it, “Even in its early forms, Hip Hop was about community, with artists … giving voice to a group of people that had no voice, questioning authority, recovering empty answers, and providing spiritual guidance for its members. This emphasis on empowering the powerless would carry on throughout the explosive growth Hip Hop experienced in the years to come.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{11} Daniel White Hodge, \textit{The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).
\textsuperscript{12} Hodge, \textit{The Soul of Hip Hop}, 38.
\textsuperscript{13} Hodge, \textit{The Soul of Hip Hop}, 42.
\textsuperscript{14} Scholars that have highlighted the four “main elements of Hip Hop” include: Murray Forman, \textit{The ’Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-hop} (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002); George Nelson, \textit{Hip Hop America} (New York: Penguin, 2005); Joseph G. Schloss, \textit{Foundation: B-boys, B-girls and Hip-hop Culture in New York} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), among many others.
\textsuperscript{15} Hodge, \textit{The Soul of Hip Hop}, 43
\textsuperscript{16} Hodge, \textit{The Soul of Hip Hop}, 46.
\textsuperscript{17} Hodge, \textit{The Soul of Hip Hop}, 49.
emphasis on the element of entrepreneurialism is paramount to understanding what Hip Hop truly is.

What scholars have historically failed to focus on is that Hip Hop is bigger than Hip Hop music, is more than rap music and lyrical analysis, and that Hip Hop is an “African diasporic phenomenon that consists of multiple flows that create Hip Hop cliques around the world.” As Gwendolyn D. Pough puts it, “Hip Hop is a state of mind; a way of living and being that expands further then what kind of music one listens to. And there is power there, so much power, that some people are scared of it.” As Travis T. Harris also stresses, “Dispossession, saltwater slavery, forced and voluntary migration, and being strangers in a foreign land shape a Hip Hop worldview [including] the ability to create and sustain life, persist in the midst of oppression [and] party in the middle of the fire.” All of these elements “make up the culture and Hip Hop as a way of life.”

One might also argue that being an entrepreneur is a way of life. I posit that Hip Hop in Houston and the entrepreneurialism related to the Hip Hop South are a consequence of the African diasporic experience of the American South that Harris asserts. Additionally, the spirit of Hip Hop entrepreneurialism fuels the spirit of Hip Hop communities in Houston while contributing to the international understanding of Hip Hop and the American Hip Hop South in ways that are not fully realized in the academy.

Like Hip Hoppas globally, Houston Hip Hoppas exist in the space of African diasporic identity and collective marginalization. The ways in which they were able to create a come-up for themselves in their communities despite existing in environments not created for them to thrive is deserving of attention. Hip Hoppas embraced the inevitable collective entrepreneurialism in their communities. Hip Hop Houston entrepreneurs located in the context of the “Dirty South” contribute authentically to the discourse of the worldwide Hip Hop movement.

The Hip Hop South

Scholars of the Hip Hop South such as Regina N. Bradley and Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis contend that OutKast winning “Best New Rap Group” at the 1995 Source Awards represented a pivotal moment in Hip Hop history where the Hip Hop South finally pushed past the geographic and cultural boundaries of the American South, marking its recognition in popular Hip Hop global conversation. As Niewiadomska

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20 Harris, “Can It Be Bigger Than Hip Hop,” 6.

puts it, “southern rap [became] the third widely recognized regional genre of American hip hop.”

In fact, Texas originally received the “Third Coast” nickname, but the term has been adopted to include the Southern Gulf Coast, and subsequently (as Hip Hop spread) the entire Southern US, thereby defining Bradley’s “Hip Hop South.” For decades, Houston Third Coast Hip Hop entrepreneurs were unable to secure national recognition and the funding of big record labels, so they hustled the culture themselves. “Unable to secure big national labels to promote their albums in the late 1980s and early 1990s, southern [Hip Hoppas] turned to their own independent record labels (e.g., No Limit Records in New Orleans, and Hypnotize Minds in Memphis) and appeared on mixtapes.” That being said, scholars have seldom added to the academic conversation while highlighting the multifaceted ways that entrepreneurialism in the Hip Hop South enabled the culture to understand and create opportunity in their communities through the Hip Hop community.

Scholars and writers of the Hip Hop South have thus far mapped origins and place-based differences in rap music in the South. For example, Niewiadomska walks the reader through various origins of Southern Hip Hop music, such as Crunk (Memphis), Trap (Atlanta), Screwed & Chopped (Houston), Trill (Houston), party-style club Hip Hop (Miami), and Bounce (New Orleans). Speaking to the culture, Niewiadomska positions the Hip Hop South mentality:

Some southern … hip hop groups transformed what was perceived as their weakness into success – instead of being ashamed of projected negative stereotypes of their southern identity (synonymous with backwardness, trashiness, and rural sensibilities) they adopted “country” stylings (“Belts to Match,” UGK) … In each case of unapologetic acceptance of southern sensibilities repositions and authenticates the narratives of southern Black lives imbued with poverty, economic exclusion, and social inequality … encapsulated in the “Dirty South” image.

Like OutKast, Southern Hip Hop entrepreneurs needed to embrace their place outside of the mainstream, creating culture and businesses for themselves and their communities until their creations reached far and wide in the sphere of the Hip Hop global conversation. Hip Hop entrepreneurs in the South challenge “preconceived notions of the South and celebrate southern regional distinctiveness but also remain faithful to their local identities. They have embraced their marginalization and redefined the position of southern hip hop in American culture in general.” What often doesn’t make its way into

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22 Niewiadomska, ““Hip Hop and the South,” 459.
27 Bradley, Chronicling Stankonia; and Niewiadomska, “Hip Hop and the South.”
the conversation are the origin stories of the label, the artist, and the material elements and sociocultural realities of Hip Hop entrepreneurialism in southern cities.

Bradley contends that OutKast’s use of “alienation as a Hip Hop trope [in their music] makes room to renegotiate contemporary southern Blackness as a complex space otherwise oversimplified in sociocultural discussions. I agree, but I would like to shift the conversation because Hip Hop academics have not focused enough on Hip Hop entrepreneurialism as a “trope” or “Category” that embraced alienation as much as what has already been written about specific to rap music (lyrics, music videos, etc.). Because of the experiences of Hip Hoppas (like OutKast and other Southern rappers), alienation is often assumed, which leads to the desire to build something entirely from the ground up, something original, and something worthy of remembrance tied to the places that made them the entrepreneurs that they are. Hip Hoppas understand that the South is a site of “working cultural memory,” situating the very forms of the business savvy they developed in being both work and product of the very communities that culminated in their sense of entrepreneurialism.

While there has been a decent amount of Hip Hop scholars paying credence to the ways in which visual and lyrical representations pay homage to southern culture, how do the businesses, through the lens of the Hip Hoppa, also contribute to and challenge preconceived notions of the Hip Hop South? There is a lack of academic scrutiny and scholarship of the Hip Hop South through understanding various forms of grit and entrepreneurialism, one of the ten foundations of Hip Hop culture shaping the global Hip Hop conversation. What I suggest is that we can build understanding around the Hip Hop South and Hip Hop globally by studying the emic perspectives and collective identities relating to entrepreneurialism because of communities and identities tied to the Hip Hop South.

**Hip Hop Houston**

Understanding the agency of Houston’s Hip Hop entrepreneurs in the milieu of systemic and systematic racism is essential to understanding Hip Hop Houston. Just like Hip Hop coming out of New York City in the 1970s Bronx, the Hip Hop coming out of Houston, by and large created by Black people, gave birth to a new genre, tying together the locality, the sounds, the South, and the post-Jim Crow realities that simply weren’t present in other Hip Hop “birthplaces.” The rise of Black music and subsequent

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community-building is paramount in understanding the Hip Hop culture that would form there. Hip Hop entrepreneurialism in Houston has historically been both the work and product of Blackness, Black empowerment and Black identity distinctive to the Dirty South.

For example, Black entrepreneurship has been a characteristic of Fifth Ward in Houston since the 1920s. In the 1920s, Black Houstonians, including migrants and Creoles of color, built a thriving community that has continued to expand since World War I.32 By 1925, “over 40 African American owned businesses lined Lyons Avenue, the main artery of the black neighborhood on the north side.”33 Fifth Ward has been a mecca for Black entrepreneurship in Houston for a century. While not many Black Americans live there today, during the Jim Crow era, “African Americans in Houston championed the maintenance and protection of black communities as an issue of racial pride, and they used neighborhoods like Fifth Ward as buffers against White supremacy.”34

Examples of Black (African diasporic) entrepreneurialism permeate Houston’s history. For example, Club Matinee, which opened in 1936, became known as “the Cotton Club of the South” and was a focal point for Black businesses, Black entertainment, and Black entrepreneurship in the 1950s.35 Additionally, Don Robey, who opened the Bronze Peacock Dinner Club in the 1940s, Duke Peacock records, and Gold Star Studios in the Third Ward in the 1950s, was a well-known Black entrepreneur and had a reputation for ruthlessness. Robey evidenced that the place-based strategies of Black Houstonian entrepreneurship rooted in cultural movement have been consistent for a century, if not longer. As Hip Hop has roots in entrepreneurialism, Hip Hop Houston has roots in the Black businesses that existed in Houston before Hip Hop had a name.

Fast forward to the 1990s, entrepreneurs such as DJ Screw (founder of Screwed Up Records), Michael Watts, and OG Ron C (founders of Swishahouse) continuously established Black businesses in the same historically Black neighborhoods, pushing past and often defying legality in their culture creation while creating thriving businesses despite the difficult realities of systemic and systematic racism in the South.

The roots of Chopped and Screwed were conveyed in Hip Hop but Chopped and Screwed and the entrepreneurialism and influence of DJ Screw and Swishahouse were born in Houston because of Houston. For the last century, culture creation stemming from the Black experience in Houston has served as an agent of rejection of White norms and White supremacy. Members of Black communities have historically taken action and claimed their agency when faced with oppression. In Houston, this action is best shown through the emergence of “place entrepreneurs” who are “ethnic actors” that have been

32 Steptoe, Houston Bound, 66.
33 Steptoe, Houston Bound, 66.
34 Steptoe, Houston Bound, 67.
35 Steptoe, Houston Bound, 192.
able to demonstrate resilience and counter elite interests to serve their interests and the interests of their communities. Houston Hip Hop is and has historically been a creative and adaptive space filled with place entrepreneurs.

The role of systemic and systematic racism in urban planning in Houston directly relates to the rise of Hip Hop entrepreneurialism in the city. The band of Black neighborhoods in the Third, Fourth and Fifth wards that surrounded the central business district were prejudicially deemed “undesirable,” which had devastating consequences on these communities through processes of redlining, clearance, and lack of funding for public infrastructure. Houston’s oldest Black neighborhoods faced redevelopment and demolition despite their efforts to collectively preserve their districts. After the Fourth Ward’s neighborhood residential and cultural vitality was mitigated by the Gulf Freeway, “the center of African American economic and cultural life shifted to the Fifth Ward and the Third Ward.”

The White, mainstream perception of Black spaces in the city contributed to the justification of urban neglect. Houston is thought of as part of the “Dirty South” by mainstream culture or as the Southern other. If urban planners are actively destroying and/or restricting the emergence of place-based resources in Black neighborhoods such as grocery stores, banks, affordable dining, gas stations, goods, and services, it becomes very clear that the emergence of place entrepreneurs becomes necessary and inevitable, and occurred in Houstonian communities in need of capitalistic ventures without any external aide.

Thus far I’ve provided evidence of the necessary birth of Hip Hop entrepreneurialism in Houston. The “Hood” became a form of resistance in post–Jim Crow Houston. Hip Hop practice in Houston, like Hip Hop everywhere, stands in opposition to White supremacy, and therefore, mainstream society. “Segments of black youth, men, and women use public and private settings within their ‘hoods to enact their collective social life, thus creating a space called the streets.” Within the streets, Black youth grow up with an oppositional set of attitudes and an oppositional set of practices. Black Americans growing up in “the streets” had to “hustle.” Black Houstonians growing up in the streets created businesses, creative spaces, and Black culture as a means of a come-up and to form an empowered collective consciousness and resistance.

Regardless of having experienced desecration, destruction, and lacking governmental funding pre– and post–Jim Crow, Black Houstonians sought to control the narrative and create what Lefebvre calls “differential space”: An oppositional space, a

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38 Miller, “Dirty Decade.”
39 Wilkins, “Screwston, TX,” 45.
40 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 47–63 and 268–90.
rejection of the material realities that were forced upon them in favor of the symbolic and tangible values that reflect and uplift agency in speaking truth to power through music-making and culture creation, while capitalizing on all of it.

Credence must be paid to scholars that have written in depth about the Hip Hop businesses in Houston. For example, Maco Faniel names Soundwaves Record Store as one of the founding Hip Hop businesses in the 1980s in his groundbreaking book *Hip Hop in Houston*, and scholar Jimmy Patiño explores the ways in which Mexican and Black identities were shaped by the presence of the record store in the early 2000s. In understanding the importance of Hip Hop as an African Diasporic phenomenon without explicitly stating it, Patiño describes how the record store served as “a meeting space that both brought hip hop to Houston from major centers like New York but also [enabled] the local community formations of artists and consumers in local neighborhoods throughout Houston.” Patiño proposed that the site provided an opportunity for academics to analyze ways in which Hip Hop manifested itself at the street level, paying particularly close attention to how Hip Hop consumers, particularly Latina/o and Black community members, identified as rap enthusiasts who had a shared experience of “the ‘hood”. However, Patiño’s article is limited in scope, focusing on consumer culture and not necessarily on Hip Hop entrepreneurialism and the founding of the store.

I agree with previous scholars like Patiño and Faniel that the role of the businesses themselves and the consumer culture that surrounds them are equally important in understanding what Hip Hop Houston truly was, and, subsequently, what Hip Hop truly is. However, I want to bring forward the entrepreneur perspective of Hip Hoppas in Houston under closer academic scrutiny so that a greater understanding is built around what Hip Hop collectivity includes, where we’ve been and where we’re heading.

**In Their Words: Hip Hop Houston Entrepreneurialism**

As Hip Hop Historian Lance Scott Walker puts it, “Houston’s superstars had a lot of help building their communities, and some of the lesser-known characters have big stories they’ve just never been asked to tell. … Mainstream attention may come and go, but the neighborhoods keep on living and breathing, and everybody sticks around.” Hip Hoppas in Houston throughout the generations have embraced a Hip Hop South “all-from-scratch” mentality, making Hip Hoppas inherently entrepreneurial. But don’t

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42 Patiño, “‘Growin’ up in the ‘hood same as me,’” 74.

43 Patiño, “‘Growin’ up in the ‘hood same as me,’” 75.

just take it from me. Take it from Hip Hoppas that have something to say about their own rise.

By the mid-nineties, DJ Screw released homemade mix tapes, which turned gangster rap “into something trippier,” commanding a genre called Screwed & Chopped. Screwed & Chopped was created to mimic the feeling of drinking codeine-laced cough syrup, the prescription drug intended for patients with lung cancer. Houstonians followed DJ Screw’s lead and started to slow down “the beats of a familiar track until they’re thunderclaps and the vocals until they’re the rumble of a brontosaurus herd. Its woozy, sedated sound is the perfect backdrop for slowly cruising around a sprawling, overheated city.” By the year 2005, Houston and the musical styling of DJ Screw gained national recognition. Screw’s contribution, via rap music, gave Houstonians a style that they could capitalize on, and everyone in the city who followed Hip Hop understood.

DJ Screw, who passed away on November 16, 2000, was certainly not the first to stylize Hip Hop music coming out of Houston. His predecessors included Geto Boys, K-Rino, Ricardo Royal, K9, Willie D, and many others. However, DJ Screw invented a genre and laid the groundwork for some of Houston’s most prominent rappers to become successful entrepreneurs. Coming out of South Park, DJ Screw created a Hip Hop space in his own place, his neighborhood, where the Screwed-Up Click conducted business. Conversely, Swishahouse Records, which was founded on the North side, rounded up the talent on that side of town. Remarkably, the death of DJ Screw played a prominent role in unifying Hip Hop entrepreneurs in Houston.

Hip Hop entrepreneurialism would remain Houston-centric as many artists donated money back into local studios and played on each other’s records instead of leaving and pursuing capitalistic ventures with major record labels prominent in New York and LA. According to Bernard James Freeman (AKA Bun B, former member of the prominent rap duo UGK, guest lecturer at Rice University, and one of Houston’s most prominent Black entrepreneurs), “[DJ Screw] could have [made] a lot more money off the tapes, he could have been more famous, but it wasn’t about him, it’s about the city … it’s about the ‘hood and the people we represent … that’s why we hold him in such high regard.”

48 Faniel, Hip Hop in Houston.
49 Faniel, Hip Hop in Houston.
Having been able to talk to MC Wickett Cricket (real name Darrell Veal), historian Lance Scott Walker gained insightful firsthand knowledge from one of Houston’s first Hip Hop artists and repertoire. Having given DJ Screw his first gig (along with many other Houston rappers and artists, booking shows and weekly nightclub gigs throughout the city until his death in 2015), Veal was “there for every movement in Houston hip-hop.” Veal provided Walker with primary source evidence proving that the business of Hip Hop and the creativity that Hip Hoppas needed to keep their businesses and Hip Hop communities thriving is apparent. Since rap was new in the ‘80s and ‘90s to the city, young talent didn’t have access to studios, so many Hip Hop entrepreneurs created studio spaces right in their houses and even threw concerts in their backyards. In discussions about South Park Rapper Robert Harlan, Veal points out that “they had a studio at his house … they [threw] a big concert … at the studio they had in his house … During that time Rap-A-Lot was [also] doing stuff.” So, even though some studios sprang up in the city, entrepreneurs continued to push boundaries and create Hip Hop spaces of business in private homes and even in public places. At times Hip Hoppas were forced to shift locations to keep the culture alive, underscoring the tenacity of the Hip Hop entrepreneur at the time. Veal sheds light on some of the struggles they faced to keep the culture and the businesses thriving. For example, the forceful hand of the authorities ensured that his Hip Hop collective needed to be scrappy and adaptable to keep the party going. “We was goin’ to MacGregor Park on Sundays [to throw concerts.] But then after the law start trippin’, they took it all the way to the Northside … to Deussen Park on Sundays.” Veal and other Hip Hop entrepreneurs in the city continue to prove that Hip Hop is adaptable, creative, and boundary-push ing and the entrepreneurial mentality engrained in Hip Hoppas allows the movement to persist.

While DJ Screw may have given Houston its own nationally recognized Hip Hop identity that was embraced by Houston Hip Hoppas to (re)create a sense of unity, according to Trace Crutchfield (once a journalist and producer for VBS IPTV) there has been a huge tradition in Houston of pumping most earnings back into the local recording studio with many of the rappers being extremely prolific locally and often on one another’s records. This is due in large part to the pioneering practices of DJ Screw and the Screwed-Up Click. The South Park coalition would follow suit and maintain this tradition. For many, DJ Screw paved the way for Houston Hip Hop entrepreneurs to make a significant living within the neighborhoods that had been systematically oppressed without having to fit into and create work and success within the mainstream, White-dominated culture.

54 Crutchfield, Screwed in Houston.
What other elements allowed the business of Hip Hop to flourish in Houston? Ricky Royal, one of the rappers in the emblematic Rap-A-Lot Records group Royal Flush, which helped put Houston on the proverbial “map,” sheds light on how it all started. For him, battle rap defined the emergence of Hip Hop in Houston: “If you wanted to be a rapper in Houston, you wanted to be known, you had to battle. We came up the hard way … if you wanted to be a rapper you had to come to Rhinestone Wrangler, and before that Flashes … the battle rapping that we did on those stages made people want to start a record company … it went from us competing to the way you would get known in Houston.”55 I contend that the recognition of the battle rap as a founding element of Hip Hop Houston speaks to the nature of Hip Hop existing as a mindset in the city and a mindset globally; a gritty, powerful tool that also brings together a collectivity with similar struggles and life experiences in the name of the movement, self-reliance, and entrepreneurial obstinacy.

What was happening in Houston Hip Hop gained widespread local recognition before it ever became nationally commodified, and the battle rap was of paramount importance regarding how the scene spread. Artists such as K-Rino and Houston Hip Hop pioneer DJ Steve Fournier question why scholars like Nelson George (a prominent author and Hip Hop scholar) neglected this cornerstone of Houston Hip Hop in their writings. According to DJ Steve Fournier, during a panel discussion at A Screwed-Up History conference, hosted by the University of Houston,

Nelson George comes down to do interviews with me, goes away, and writes [his] article and my name ain’t mentioned nowhere … now, the way I feel in New York and LA, they are looking for marketable people … but then they exploit them and make music and say ‘go do your little rap thing, make 2 or 3 million’ … there needs to be a club in Houston that does that … they need to have people go through the whole process again and realize what [it was] really about … people would miss work the next day to see these guys do this.56

Fournier actively defended his city by recognizing its neglected acknowledgment in the national Hip Hop discussion. Until Maco Faniel provided an extensive story on the battle rap phenomena coming out of Houston, scholars of Hip Hop had not given due credit to the city. The “battle rap” in famous clubs such as Fournier’s Rhinestone Wrangler and Flashes in the mid-1980s and 1990s are exemplary of iconic public places in which Houston Hip Hop was prominently recognized and enjoyed locally prior to national commodification. The battle raps that took place at the Rhinestone Wrangler and Flashes were public displays of what defined Houston Hip Hop for so many involved in the culture, pitting Hip Hop entrepreneurs against one another to win money and notoriety. Hip Hop entrepreneurs who were Emcees needed to embrace the battle rap distinctive to

the city to become locally successful and respected, once again proving that grit defined the mentality of the Hip Hop entrepreneur in the city.

The exclusivity of Houston’s battle rap culture made it private and distinct. According to artist Willie D, a Houston native, “in the beginning people would come up to my door and ask to battle … it was a fight culture in my neighborhood.” In addition, Trace Crutchfield, who was invited to a “thug barbeque” in Houston’s Third Ward while filming VICE’s documentary Screwed In Houston recollects “a lot of people know about Hip Hop in Houston because of people like Paul Wall and Mike Jones, but it’s in places like this backyard where it all began.” Crutchfield met up with one individual, a rapper by the name of Kyu Boi, who introduced him to the entire South Park Coalition and other rapper coalitions based in Third Ward. His piece alluded to the power and the sociality of a locally based Hip Hop movement, exemplifying that Hip Hop businesses in Houston arose in privatized spaces and places within the communities of significance and meaning to the Houston-centric Hip Hop movement.

The privatized production of the music itself speaks volumes. According to Crutchfield, “These guys [Houston rappers] operated outside of the major record label system … so they make more money selling it out of the back of their cars, on the streets, hustling it themselves, then they would ever make if they signed a deal … it was rumored that DJ Screw sold 50,000 copies of a single mix!” Their stories elevate the persistence and self-sufficiency of Hip Hop Houston, the Hip Hop South, and Hip Hop around the globe.

Operating outside of the major record label system was certainly not always by choice. According to Bun B, major record labels are consistently business-first, looking for marketable rappers and artists. He notes the difficulty that Houston emcees faced from the beginning. “They took all of the fun out of this shit for us … all the ‘makin a record, going somewhere, getting a deal, you know … we did that shit we tried that shit for years, got turned down again and again, doors slammed in your face.” However, he goes on to say that in the newly formed Houston Hip Hop arena at the time “none of these guys ever thought they’d get a major recording deal … these cats learned to make what they needed to make it happen outside of the system.” Bun B and Crutchfield nail that talented Hip Hop entrepreneurs in Houston tended to rise, rather than succumb to failure, in the face of structural racism, urban neglect, and marginalization while

58 Crutchfield, Screwed in Houston.
59 Crutchfield, Screwed in Houston.
60 Crutchfield, Screwed in Houston.
61 Bun B, as interviewed in Crutchfield’s Screwed in Houston.
62 Crutchfield, Screwed in Houston.
operating outside of the Hip Hop record label and established businesses to form something authentically their own.

James Prince, the founder of Rap-A-Lot records in 1986, exemplified Hip Hop entrepreneurial resilience. Watching his mother struggle to raise his family in the context of the dark realities of Fifth Ward inspired him to become an entrepreneur and create his own business. For a long time, Rap-A-Lot wasn’t able to produce a distribution deal because of the hard-core street elements of Houston Hip Hop. The label would come to independently distribute records like Geto Boys’ Makin Trouble; songs that were stylistically similar to popular tracks coming out of New York at the time but were emblematic of the group’s fearlessness to publicly display the space and lawlessness of the Fifth Ward. Records coming from Rap-A-Lot would then inspire a collective consciousness that all former gangsters-turned-rappers would recognize; Hip Hop entrepreneurs in Houston began to collectively “put on” for the city and promote their home front.

In a separate interview, Ricky Royal also describes his stark come-up on the scene. Royal started hustling as early as age 11. “I used to serve fiends in my daddy’s trap. My daddy and my step mama had a trap ... the fiends would come to the crib ... I served ‘em. So, I would get twenty dollars off every $100.” Ricky highlights a bleaker side to the Hip Hop entrepreneurial experience: operating outside of the confines of the law to put bread on the table. In high school, Royal joined a collectivity that was “really a gang that had rappers in it … if you knew us, you was just part of Royal Flush. That’s how we started off.” Royal Flush is exemplary in Hip Hop entrepreneurialism: the original members came together through community practices existing outside of the legal system, then created a business based on raw talent and business savvy.

Bun B also reminisces: “Gangs roll in numbers, so that’s what we did … initially we are selling Houston, but now we got to come together as a collective and say we are Houston … we may not like each other but we got to put the bullshit aside and stand up for the city.” The methods that Hip Hop entrepreneurs have used have been nothing but intentional, thus promoting their labels, their city, and claiming their Hip Hop space in the greater milieu of Hip Hop globally. Sentiments expressed by prominent Texas rappers such as Bun B, Paul Wall, and Mike Jones are contiguous with Houston’s Hip Hop story. According to Paul Wall, “Artists who weren’t on Rap-A-Lot sold music out of their car trunks ... out of their houses. There were three radio stations that had begun

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66 Royal, “Ricky Royal,” 62.
67 Crutchfield, *Screwed in Houston*.

[67]
airing Hip Hop [in the early 1990s] but hardly any of the music was local.” The come-up wasn’t easy, but what founding Hip Hoppas created in Houston was nothing short of exceptional.

Right around 1992, Houston was just recovering from the oil bust; the economic future of the city looked promising, and high-investment areas such as the Galleria began to look glamorous. However, at the same time, the new crack epidemic gripped lower-income neighborhoods. Adrian Lee echoes the circumstances of the time: “It was against this backdrop that Houston’s [Hip Hop] scene had started to form ... Rap-A-Lot Records, run by a savvy and tenacious businessman named James Prince, who defied the stereotypes of Texas music by promoting groups like the Geto Boys, whose raw lyrics provoked controversy and whose album art included a real photo of one member just after his eye had been shot out.”

Structural mistreatment and resulting violence within communities continue to have a cyclical conversation with Houston Hip Hop, once again proving that pain and suffering can result in the most empowering movements beyond empirical measure. Hip Hop Houston and the Hip Hop South are innately controversial, and early Hip Hoppas thrived in the spaces of controversy and self-sufficiency before becoming mainstream culture creators themselves.

Additionally, based on what Hip Hoppas from Houston have observed and articulated, the influence of Hip Hop Houston on material culture (and therefore, business) has been understated in America and globally. Accessories such as gold chains and S.L.A.B.S (“slow-loud-and-banging,” tricked-out big body cars) as we know them today were prominent in Houston, according to the Hip Hoppas themselves, before the trend was picked up in many other cities. According to Baldhead, owner of Baldhead Entertainment, a Hip Hop coalition in Houston, “we’ve been doing our thing, we’ve been rockin’ our big chains, we’ve been riding slabs ... half of the style that’s out right now comes from Houston, other cats emulating our style, using our words, and runnin’ with it.” Baldhead emphasizes that the Hip Hop entrepreneurs of the city have been influential both locally and nationally for decades, again (re)writing Houston Hip Hop as something appropriated and emulated by others in the Hip Hop game, influencing the style and material culture used by Hip Hop entrepreneurs globally.

Prominent Hip Hop scholar and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* Travis T. Harris interviewed Kidricc James, Houston-based rapper and emcee who has been “in the game” for more than a decade and has collaborated with big-name artists such as Big K.R.I.T., Ludacris, Bun B, and Pusha T. James reiterates what it was like to be an emcee and entrepreneur when Houston wasn’t even on the proverbial “map”:

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70 Crutchfield, *Screwed in Houston.*
We had no choice. We didn’t have the resources an LA or NY person would have, but we had mom-and-pop stores so we utilized that. We also went out to areas that had no access to music and capitalized on that … We went out and created fan bases in places that were being ignored and they became faithful followers because of the fact that we reached out to them when nobody else would. I can remember a time when I would literally load up my trunk with boxes of CDs and sell them and come home with enough money to pay my bills for the month in a matter of a few hours.71

Kidricc echoes his predecessors. From the founder of Duke Peacock Records Don Robey to DJ Screw and UGK, Hip Hop Houston entrepreneurs consistently reiterate that in order to achieve success in Hip Hop they needed to create financial success for themselves by engaging those who identify with Hip Hop in Houston first.

I had another conversation with Hiram Trevino, a working DJ, producer, and educator in Houston. Before social media became a dominant force of culture creation and the Hip Hop community it is today, Trevino came up by going to Houston parties and began his career by building relationships with other artists, producers, and DJs (all of whom are Hip Hop entrepreneurs themselves) in the Houston area. Hiram DJ’d at local establishments such as Boondocks and Etro Lounge. While music-making and Hip Hop spaces in Houston are truly eclectic today, Trevino is poignant to mention that credence to Houston Hip Hop and their heyday will forever be a part of collective Hip Hop Houston pride:

There are a handful of songs that I think are classics in Houston. You know, Southside [Lil’ Keke ft. AL-D, D.J. Screw, and 3-2], Tops Draw by Fat Pat … and then there’s Bun B’s ‘Internationals Player Anthem’ … classics like those are the ones that people hear internationally and they sample it and they remix it. So more of the classic Houston Hip Hop is not really in the same lane with the music we always play [now] unless we choose to take them there … I think what’s happening right now in Houston … the club music is really taking off.72

While Hip Hop entrepreneurs in the city are not limited to place-based entrepreneurialism alone in the fully digital age, Hip Hop entrepreneurs have adapted in the city. As Trevino states, “No one is still … poppin’ trunks and selling tapes. It’s such a different time. There’s not a lot of that cold, nitty gritty, old-school style still happening … [although] I do think a lot of people are still into the whole Screw style.”73

The iconic Screw-based Hip Hop culture is still being capitalized on by Hip Hop entrepreneurs in the city. Trevino mentioned The Choppaholix as well-known in the area for keeping Screwed & Chopped alive. “The Choppaholix get hit up by bigger artists to make a chop-not-slop version of songs. That’s what they call their remixes.”74 Likewise, OG Ron C, one of the founders of Swishahouse Records, still runs ChopNotSlop Radio.

71 Kidricc James, personal interview conducted by Travis T. Harris, October 10, 2022.
72 Hiram Trevino, personal interview conducted by Brittany Long, July 7, 2022.
73 Trevino, personal interview.
74 Trevino, personal interview.
available online. Ron C helped jump-start the careers of Chamillionaire, Paul Wall, and Mike Jones and is now the self-proclaimed Drake’s #1 Chop DJ and has even released “Chop Not Slop” versions of Drake’s albums, such as *Certified Lover Boy* and *Views*.

However, similar to what Bun B suggested when Houston-centric Hip Hop culture was thriving locally in the nineties and aughts before gaining national attention, Trevino suggests that there may be a grittier side to holding true to Houston Hip Hop style today. “Z-Ro and Trae the Truth [are] Houston, still doing that style. But they’re not pop stars. So, it’s almost like Houston style held them back.” The subject is open for debate: does staying true to what the nation would come to recognize as stylistically Houston Hip Hop in rap music keep talented Hip Hop entrepreneurs and business owners from being accepted in the mainstream lane today?

While staying authentic to classic Hip Hop culture in Houston may still keep regionally recognized artists from being marketable in the mainstream consciousness, an undeniable distinct kind of collective unity arose during the height of Houston Hip Hop entrepreneurialism in the city. Southern artists existed in opposition to and outside of the East Coast/West Coast Hip Hop mainstream and demonstrated a more united front in “putting on” for their cities. However, this unity in Houston did not happen without trial. Trevino echoed what other Hip Hoppas from the city have been expressing for decades, “The two groups that came to the forefront were Swishahouse and Screwed Up Click ... there was a rivalry going on.” Kidricc James was already doing his thing during the rivalry between Screwed Up Click and Swishahouse. “I can honestly say that the unity in the ‘hood, as well as the Hip Hop community, was something that was dope before the Civil War [the label rivalry that resulted in violence between affiliates of Screwed Up Click and Swishahouse]. It got really bad for a while, but we got past it, and we are one Houston now.” As Hip Hop’s roots are in entrepreneurialism, thus comes capitalism and competition. Likewise, as Hip Hop’s roots come from collective experiences stemming from violence caused by racism, violence historically makes its way into Hip Hop entrepreneurs’ collective stories.

Hip Hop businesses that started from the ground up still prosper to this day in the city. For example, world-renowned Screwed Up Records remains standing and thriving. Trevino confirms, “Screwed Up Records is one place where whenever I book someone from out of town, artists, producers from like the Netherlands and Europe ... they come here and that’s one of the places they want to see. If they don’t want to see it, then that’s one of the places I take them anyway ... I love taking them to the shop.”

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76 Trevino, personal interview.
77 Bradley, *Chronicling Stankonia*.
78 Trevino, personal interview.
79 James, personal interview.
80 Trevino, personal interview.
confirms, “As long as [Screwed Up Record’s] doors are open, people will always come because that is a part of the culture. The kids don’t necessarily tune in with that because I mean … you can’t listen to Screw on Molly. The times have definitely changed, but The Screw Shop is definitely still alive and thriving.”\textsuperscript{81} While both Trevino and James organically agreed in separate conversations that the culture has changed on the ground, what can be confirmed is that Hip Hop businesses spearheaded by known entrepreneurs are alive and are continually evolving for and within the city today.

To this day, Bun B continues to represent and capitalize on his legendary identity as one of Houston’s biggest Hip Hop entrepreneurs and culture creators. In 2022 Bun B launched Trill Burgers, which competed in Good Morning America’s Best Smash Burger competition and won.\textsuperscript{82} The branding itself speaks to how Hip Hop pervades material culture and is about so much more than music. Rapper Trae the Truth provided a non-capitalistic example of Hip Hop-based community building by identifying as Hip Hop through his founding of Angel by Nature, a natural disaster relief fund supporting Houston and surrounding areas, which was inspired by his own experience surviving hurricane Harvey in 2017.\textsuperscript{83}

Communally and capitalistically, Houston Hip Hop entrepreneurs have been giving back and (re)creating Hip Hop in underfunded communities in various ways for decades. As Faniel notes, “Houston’s rap artists and label owners created a business model that often emphasized local sales over national exposure.”\textsuperscript{84} I posit that this mentality still exists in the minds of many Houston Hip Hop entrepreneurs, confirming that Hip Hop is about so much more than rap music. Hip Hop entrepreneurs in the city continue to pay homage to their Southern roots, placing Hip Hop Houston and the Hip Hop South above, simply put, selling out for mainstream fame.

Kidricc agreed there are high-caliber Houston artists who give back to their communities because that is a stake and a price to be paid while growing up collectively Black in the South and particularly in Houston, Texas. “I definitely think the collective struggle of being Black and Brown in the South and Texas definitely creates a different type of unity. You have to keep in mind that it’s 2022 and there are still towns that it’s not safe for me to be in as a Black man. Texas is its own country and racism is still very alive and well, and we all are reminded of that on a constant basis, so it has created a sense of unity that doesn’t exist in other places because we have a common enemy.”\textsuperscript{85} When digging a little deeper into this collective sentiment of being southern and grounded, it seems Hip Hop Houston sets itself apart from Hip Hop entrepreneurialism.

\textsuperscript{81} James, personal interview.
\textsuperscript{83} Angel by Nature, non-profit organization and relief fund, \url{https://www.angelbynature.com}
\textsuperscript{84} Faniel, \textit{Hip Hop in Houston}, 25.
\textsuperscript{85} James, personal interview.
in other cities. According to James, “I can say that our stars are still in touch with the communities that they come from, but I think that comes from just a Southern tradition of family … we don’t get caught up in the glamor because truth be told, glamor really isn’t something that exists down here … it’s just the way we were raised.”

Conclusion

Scholars such as Maco Faniel, Regina N. Bradley, Lance Scott Walker, and others will continue to inspire up-and-coming academics to ensure that the voices and stories of the Hip Hop South will be heard and examined through an academic lens. As Bradley puts it, “The South is not a monolith. The criticism that engages it should also be non-monolithic.” Studying Hip Hop-based entrepreneurialism and the resulting community-building practices (or lack thereof) should continue to be explored and represented in the academy in order to understand the truth and tenacity of what Hip Hop truly is: a collective consciousness not bound by space and time. Hopefully this study will encourage Hip Hop academics to examine Hip Hop in other cities, states, and countries through a lens of Hip Hop entrepreneurialism. It would be important to understand how Hip Hop entrepreneurs outside of emcees, artists and repertoires, and producers contribute to the conversations around Hip Hop entrepreneurialism in Hip Hop Houston, the Hip Hop South, and Hip Hop globally.

Further study is needed relating to the Hip Hop South regarding the nine underrepresented foundations of Hip Hop culture that Daniel White Hodge suggests (excluding Emceeing): entrepreneurialism, DJing and turntablism, breaking, break dancing and b-boy ing, graffiti, break beats, street knowledge, street language, street fashion, and knowledge of God and self. As other scholars of Hip Hop and the Hip Hop South have suggested, the Hip Hop South should be dissected and studied in greater detail than just highlighting musical contributions and storytelling through rap music alone. Other elements of the foundation of Hip Hop should be examined to understand the larger contribution that Hip Hop has had locally, nationally, and globally, providing place-based and financial success to those who otherwise may not have achieved it and may have continued to exist on the peripheries of societies riddled by poverty and violence.

I contend that Hip Hoppas globally can identify with Hip Hop Houston and the Hip Hop South because of the Hip Hop South’s ability to cultivate “a communal identity and [provide] multiple ways of resistance” because Hip Hop actors around the world can identify with being resistors, existing on the peripheries of society, existing in racist societies, and forging their own come-up despite being displaced, treated as scapegoats

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86 James, personal interview.
87 Bradley, Chronicling Stankonia.
88 Hodge, The Soul of Hip Hop, 43.
89 Harris, “Can It Be Bigger Than Hip Hop,” 16.
exposed to violence, and oppressed worldwide. Further study of Hip Hop Houston and the Hip Hop South will contribute to the field of Hip Hop studies, recognizing that the study of the Hip Hop South is an authentic study of Hip Hop’s global identity, and can contribute to the global perspective of the field.

Understanding place-based entrepreneurialism will also contribute to understanding the ways in which Hip Hop entrepreneurialism shifts across regional boundaries, space, and time, and that the possibilities of a global, “Digital Hip Hop South” exist today. Can we study the Hip Hop South and the specific forms of entrepreneurialism and resistance on a global scale? Discussions of the Hip Hop South and Hip Hop Houston entrepreneurialism provide one way to ground understandings of what Hip Hop truly is, outside of rap music and lyrical analysis.

The more I study and live Hip Hop, the more I will assert that Hip Hop is innately self-sufficient and entrepreneurial and persists outside of the traditional approval of authorities, mainstream businesses, and rules. Defying legal systems, structures, the need for seed money, and the need for a business license or even entrepreneurs having MBAs, Hip Hop entrepreneurialism is a foundational reality in all things Hip Hop. Hip Hop entrepreneurialism is founded on creativity and adaptability. In fact, some Hip Hoppas learn the ins and outs of owning a business and running it well before they brand themselves and their peers as a Hip Hop business. This aspect of Hip Hop as innately entrepreneurial is one of the paramount foundations of what defined Hip Hop in Houston, Hip Hop in the South, and I argue, Hip Hop around the world. Hip Hop academics should study the Hip Hop South and contribute to the further realization that elements outside of emceeing will capture more of the true identity and grit of what Hip Hop really is.

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90 Bradley, Chronicling Stankonia.
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Grinding All My Life: Nipsey Hussle, Community Health, and Care Ethics

Pyar Seth, Carlton Keith Harrison, and Jasmyn Mackell

As John Legend said, “Nipsey was so gifted, so proud of his home, so invested in his community” (Martin, 2019). Though Nipsey Hussle certainly had a lyrical gift, the discourse after his murder remained largely focused on his work as a humanitarian and community activist. Hussle was a staunch advocate for gun control, police abolition, and education equity in Los Angeles and the State of California. Academic research has often neglected the very clear relationship between Hip Hop and health, particularly the underlying theme of improving community health. To our knowledge, Hussle never identified as a community health organizer. Still, community mobilization, outreach, and health promotion all figured centrally in his political philosophy. And so, in our paper, through an examination of the life and legacy of Nipsey Hussle, namely vis-à-vis digital media content, we reflect on Hip Hop not only as a musical genre but as a form of care and community health knowledge acquisition. Ultimately, we assert that Nipsey and his “Hip Hop capital” formed new solidarities around health justice, ushering in a wave of Black politics that positioned health as living longer and better, without fear of state and safety deprivation.

“I am an anomaly in my space. The way I exist is unique.”
— Nipsey Hussle, VladTV (2019)

Introduction

Sacrificed. Hustled. Paid the price. Grinding all his life. Ermias Joseph Asghedom, commonly known as Nipsey Hussle, was an American rapper, businessman, and activist from Los Angeles, California who had a voice that extended across communities. Hussle established an incredibly robust musical career for himself in the ever-competitive genre of Hip Hop. For example, in 2018, Hussle produced a debut album, Victory Lap, that went on to receive a nomination for Best Rap Album. Simultaneously, Hussle was a staunch advocate for gun control, police abolition, and education equity in Los Angeles and the larger Southern California area. Devastatingly, on March 31, 2019, Hussle was shot outside his store, Marathon Clothing. As the nation mourned the loss of a Hip Hop legend and commemoration began, the love for Hussle was clear. Although he did not necessarily achieve the same level of public acclaim as someone like a Biggie or 2Pac, he was known for his positivity — a singular ability to improve the life of anyone he touched (Ralph, 2019).

Reflecting on his upbringing in a Revolt Unlocked interview, Nipsey talked about the lack of healthy food in the Crenshaw area. “I grew up on fries, chili fries, barbecue, ...
pastrami, Hungry Harold’s, all of that. But we came up in a different era. Now you hear all this stuff going on with the food […] There should be something close that you can pull up to.” From here, Nipsey rallied to transform the Slauson Fish Market into a space that offered a wider array of healthy food beyond fried fish. One member of the community said, “If it was not for Nipsey, we would have nothing around here […] Nip really for the hood out here.” Hussle was dedicated to collective prosperity in Crenshaw and nested in a sustainable vision for individual and community empowerment through a combination of financial planning and political acumen (Blay, 2019). His principled economic organization seemed to have a unique capacity to mobilize communities. Who else had the ability to initiate a truce in the contested gang terrain of Los Angeles and reduce gun violence? Who else had the political acumen to facilitate a conversation between marginalized communities and local government on health and safety? And so, our paper began with taking note of a loose pattern; that is, health promotion in Hip Hop does not quite seem like an aimless, random, or one-off reference. It has felt intentional, central, and foundational to Hip Hop culture. Even when Nipsey was not using the term “health” directly, supporting his community educationally, creatively, and intellectually all did a type of community health work. Here, we not only seek to extend the study and scope of community health research into Hip Hop Studies but also show that Nipsey Hussle and his various Hip Hop literacies read and produced reality pedagogies (Emdin, 2016) — subjectivities that reflected a sense of “health in the everyday.” What made Nipsey and his political philosophy distinct? It was his attention to detail. It was his attention to not only “community health” but “community and health.”

The Community Health Movement in Hip Hop

Community health is commonly defined as a branch of public health that focuses on the maintenance, protection, and improvement of health status in communities. Well before the development of the novel coronavirus, community health was not of marginal interest to Hip Hop culture; it has consistently existed at the center of the genre. As Davey D Cook said, “From day one, Hip Hop has focused explicitly on health.” Through the late twentieth century, a period that many refer to as the Golden Age of Hip Hop, artistry was heavily immersed in worries about crack cocaine and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Born in 1985, Hussle came of an age when the drug war, a narrative ushered in by the Reagan Administration, seemed to dominate public discourse. M.K. Asante discusses how several in Hip Hop — Tupac, Melle Mel, RUN-D.M.C., Kurtis Blow, and more — condemned the Reagan Administration and the racist system of American politics in their

3 Hussle, “Why it was Important to Bring Healthy Food to the Area.”

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music. For Asante, here, Hip Hop was not merely a mode of expression; it was a political movement.6

From Styles P opening a small juice bar in New York to the Good Life Cafe in Crenshaw becoming a premier space in Southern California for both open mic talent and healthy eating, we contend that Hip Hop can and should also be conceived of as a “health movement.” Although a health condition like hypertension or heart disease has not been a focal point of Hip Hop lyrical content per se, there is quite an extensive history of those in the genre actively drawing on their personal relationship with trauma, depression, stress, and anxiety. A common assumption is that Hip Hop, a genre with pervasive hypermasculine tendencies, is diametrically opposed to any sign of weakness. But for the last decade, several people have taken a cue from the magnum opus of Biggie Smalls. In Ready to Die,7 The Notorious B.I.G. curated an album where he opened Hip Hop culture up to the nature of existential dread. Top to bottom, from the track “Everyday Struggle” to “Suicidal Thoughts,” Biggie dealt with a grim self-loathing that manifested from a creeping suspicion that “death was calling” and a feeling of being “worthless” in a community that “considered him the worst.”8 More recently, Saba also garnered considerable praise for his vulnerability on the album, Care for Me.9 In an interview with Tidal, Saba explicitly stated, “I fell in love with Hip Hop when I was playing NBA Live with my brother and the song, ”Notorious Thugs,” by Biggie came on […] it felt like it was something for me. That was the summer I started trying to rap and make my own music.”10 The spotlight on mental health is only growing. Westside Boogie (Everythings for Sale, More Black Superheroes), Kid Cudi (Man on the Moon), Angel Haze (“Cleaning Out My Closet”), Rico Nasty (Anger Management), Dave (Psychodrama),11 to name a few, have moved the conversation on mental health beyond the notion that making and consuming music is cathartic to being vocal about the importance of therapy, self-care, and establishing healthy boundaries.

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9 Saba, Care for Me, Saba Pivot, 2018.
It is often taken for granted that community organizing for health is most effective when there is a shared history and where people have a mutually agreed upon value.\textsuperscript{12} Health politics has also often assumed that health promotion is a causal mechanism, a view that an individual actor can and should be held accountable for their behavior. However, Shana Redmond encouraged our scholarship to move past narrowly defined causal thinking.\textsuperscript{13} With her work on the relationship between Hip Hop and social change, Redmond discusses the distinct ability for Hip Hop to captivate the public and force people to listen. In a 2015 interview with \textit{YouthToday}, Redmond alluded to Kendrick Lamar and said, “Music is motivation, it is a sense of camaraderie […] popular music is a lifeline for people, and music from Kendrick can give a platform to communities who are too often silenced.”\textsuperscript{14} Known to be a familiar face in Compton, California, Kendrick Lamar has been very open about his faith in the healing power of Hip Hop. When he discussed his album, \textit{To Pimp a Butterfly}, with MTV, he said, “Nothing was as vulnerable as that record […] pulling from my experience of coming up in Compton […] going through change and accepting change — that is the hardest thing for man, accepting change.”\textsuperscript{15} Ultimately, the lyrical style of the album inspired the integrated health conglomerate Kaiser-Permanente to repurpose some of his lyrical content, believing that it would challenge the stigma associated with mental health illnesses. For Kaiser-Permanente, Hip Hop was seen as a vehicle by which someone could understand and consider their own vulnerability in a manner that was relevant to them.

But Kaiser-Permanente has not been the only large-scale health institution in favor of using Hip Hop to further health communication. Shortly after Hussle’s death, The California Wellness Foundation posted a story entitled, “Remembering Nipsey Hussle.” In the article, the foundation not only recognized Hussle as someone committed to improving the health of people in the state of California but they also discussed the power of his Hip Hop ethos. Hussle argued that Crenshaw needed approaches and strategies that matched their lifeworld. For him, Hip Hop was a natural resource, a fuel that matched the essence of the neighborhood. It was a platform to both identify and discuss emotion and share complex, untold stories — an empowerment-oriented practice that could be used to spread information. Andreana Clay has delineated how the genre has functioned as an essential tool for young Black people to increase political mobilization


in their local communities. Those associated with Hip Hop culture have often been labeled as troubled, or dangerous. However, Clay was quite keen on challenging that dominated, racialized notion and showcasing a cohort of thoughtful, creative, and courageous youth who insisted on using popular culture to fight against organized abandonment.

Based on his experience teaching a Hip Hop–centered English literature course in a Philadelphia high school, Marc Lamont Hill also discusses how the creative scheme, narrative style, rhythm, and flow of Hip Hop was a helpful tool for renegotiating classroom identities and balancing classroom power. As Nas famously said, “All I need is one mic to spread my voice to the world.” Here, one could interpret the minimalism of “one mic” as a representation of the transformative possibilities inherent to rhythmically expressed speech. Giving a person “one mic” is an invitation to empower a single voice, to provide a venue through which one can free associate, improvise, and maximize the potential to unblock repressed pain and existential angst.

Formulating a critical pedagogy with the ability to inspire in education and beyond, Raphael Travis later placed Hip Hop Studies front and center of the medical humanities conversation, documenting how art and creative expression can be used to cultivate health and humanize medical practice. For Travis, health equity is more than improving access to infrastructure or increasing investment in medical technologies; it is a commitment to ensuring that people feel cared for. It was here that Olajide Williams became inspired to create the initiative known as Hip Hop Public Health. Through an iterative cycle of program evaluation, academic research, and resource refinement, Hip Hop Public Health focuses on developing pedagogical strategies that encourage self-care. For example, more recently, Stand Up to Cancer (SU2C) partnered with Chuck D and Hip Hop Public Health to produce a health campaign on the low rate of colorectal cancer screening among Black and Latino communities.

For Williams, Hip Hop is neither a panacea nor a cure-all, but rather a well-documented, responsive tool. Building on some of the extant literature on therapy, Akeem Sule and Becky Inkster contended that Hip Hop, like any form of music, can be implicated in the refinement of psychotherapies and

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psychoeducation, the enhancement of recruitment and retention in psychiatry, and help with anti-stigma campaign messaging.\(^2\)

At the same time, psychological intervention must be made culturally accessible. Hussle seemed to display an awareness of the healing power of Hip Hop well before the genre became attached to the medical humanities. Did his activism inspire his music or vice versa? For Hussle, one could deduce that it was likely a symbiotic relationship. He organized a sound that affirmed the history and communal narrative of Afro-diasporic people, destabilizing hegemony discourse and legitimizing counterhegemonic interpretation. Consider the following reflection offered by Shauntece Laurent on the life and legacy of Nipsey Hussle:

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It was not until my junior year in high school that I regained interest in my education. The evolution of his music gave me language and hope to take interest in myself above any and all negative opinion about me and where I come from.\(^3\)
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It is no secret that Hussle and his music resonated deeply with South Los Angeles and Black communities across the country. He provided a counternarrative to inner city life in a manner that was palpable to the community he came from. Hussle continuously referenced his Los Angeles gang membership in his music and discussed the original intent of what it meant to be a gang member. In the past, to be a gang member was to contribute value and love to the community. Rather than look toward a racist police state for protection, many Black people viewed gang presence as the safer option. Hussle harnessed the gangster from street life to center his experience and other people working outside or at the bottom of the capitalist economy. As Marquese McFerguson and Aisha Durham have said, “Hussle refused to disavow his Crenshaw community, including the gang terrain that comprised it.”\(^4\)

For Hussle, gang membership was not about criminal punishment. Gang life was a call to address violence — the violence of extreme poverty, aggressive policing, and the lack of sustainable infrastructure. His Crip connection was about brokering peace and showcasing a viable alternative to gang membership for Black youth. Working closely with the city to shore up neighborhood infrastructure, Hussle also recognized policing and gun violence as a public health concern long before most. “I would like to prevent as many people from feeling [lost] like that as possible,” he said to Davey D.\(^5\) Soon after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released data in 2019 that reported


\(^5\) Erin E. Evans, “Nipsey Hussle’s Commitment was to his L.A. Neighborhood, Where He Had Big Plans,” NBC News, April 2, 2019, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/nipsey-hussle-commitment-was-his-l-neighborhood-where-he-n989641
Black men aged 15 to 34 represented two percent of the population but made-up thirty-seven percent of the homicidal death rate, Hussle worked to arrange a meeting with local government and law enforcement in Crenshaw. Unfortunately, he was murdered the day before that meeting was scheduled to occur.

Alongside his rap career, he started to heavily invest in businesses and real estate in the neighborhood to carve a path toward political, social, and economic success for Crenshaw writ large. In a sense, Hussle seemed to operate in almost direct accordance with the definition of community health provided by the World Health Organization (WHO). He “leveraged environmental, social, and economic acumen to sustain emotional and physical well-being to advance the concern articulated by the community.” He was a leading advocate for Destination Crenshaw, a 1.3-mile open-air museum celebrating Black history and artmaking in Crenshaw and Slauson. He committed to real estate revitalization. He invested in Vector90, a program aimed to connect Black youth in South Los Angeles to the Silicon Valley and provide educational support for them in science, technology, engineering, and math. He was also in the process of curating a documentary on the somewhat controversial yet notable self-proclaimed herbalist, Alfredo Bowman, commonly referred to as Dr. Sebi. In an interview with The Breakfast Club, Hussle claimed to be less interested in the soundness of methodology and more invested in facilitating a public conversation on holistic health. As described by Joseph Ocataviani, “What he meant to the community? If you want to look around right now, every single person that is out here [commemorating] his life, spending their time here, they are here because he spoke to them in some way, he inspired them in some way.”

Even with the release of his notable track entitled Fuck Donald Trump with YG, Hussle continued to hold community health in view. Although Black political behavior is not unidimensional, during an election cycle in which voter suppression was rampant, many Black communities across the country feared the nation would enact policies that would disproportionately harm them in health, education, transportation, and environmental safety. An engaged political citizen, Hussle believed that Trump signified a populist leader that would limit who “the people” could be, mobilize

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28 The Breakfast Club, radio program, see full interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JiZBHh7abk
resentment, license disenfranchisement, and undermine overall well-being. In a 2018 interview with Hot 97, Hussle said, “In my hood, Trump is not the type of man deserving of respect.”\textsuperscript{32} A silenced Black political voice would almost certainly undermine health justice for Black people and, in turn, Hussle looked to express his frustration with American electoral politics. When Hussle decided to collaborate with YG on the song, he placed \textit{Fuck Donald Trump} in a similar vein to N.W.A and \textit{Fuck Tha Police}\textsuperscript{33} – it became an anthem for on-the-ground protesting and spawned a movement to condemn racial violence writ large. But FDT was not solely a musical diss toward a controversial political figure. The decision to collaborate with YG meant that a Blood and a Crip would partner to mobilize the Black voting bloc. Despite the contested gang terrain, their Hip Hop practice and discourse created a connection, with, within, and between their communities and facilitated open, interpersonal communication around public health. Here, what does it mean to see Hip Hop operate as a valuable, necessary political companion to health equity, one that both diversifies citizenship participation and health messaging?

\textbf{Care Ethics: A Conversation for Public Health}

Beyond understanding how community health is defined, measured, and evaluated, there is also a substantive point to be made on the politics of care that Nipsey embodied. Christina Sharpe has theorized care by working through the following: Can I live? Where can I live? How can I live? Can I live and not, just, barely, almost, survive?\textsuperscript{34} For Sharpe, although Black people continue to make life alongside, during, and within the endless cataloging of atrocities enacted on them, one should ask: Can we hear them — their sorrow and joy, their pain and refusal, and their insistent desire and demand? Adjacently, here, there is also a question about descriptive and substantive representation. How could someone with no connection to a particular demographic or population represent that community? How could someone rapidly ascend to high-profile commercial success and believe they hold the same relationship with the community they left behind? For Sharpe, however, the grammar of care is a necessary epistemological distinction.\textsuperscript{35} That is, we must be able to attend to people, and their very real, living desire for more than what we presently have. For example, in a 2006 interview, Hip Hop journalist Davey D asked Hussle, “How come you not blinging like that?” Hussle replied with the following: “I rather invest in some real estate [...] a real asset to take care of my people [...] growing up as a kid, I was looking for somebody — not to give me anything — but somebody that cared.”\textsuperscript{36} It would not be an overstatement to say there was a strong, reciprocal love between Hussle and Crenshaw. The evidence: those

\begin{footnote}{32} Interview with Nipsey Hussle in 2013: “VladTV Full Interview with Nipsey Hussle (RIP),” DJ Vlad, \textit{YouTube}, April 19, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSmjSPAdc40
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\begin{footnote}{35} Sharpe, “And To Survive,” 177.
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\begin{footnote}{36} Evans, “Nipsey Hussle’s Commitment was to his L.A. Neighborhood.”
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from Crenshaw often referred to Hussle as their “Black Prince.”37 But his ambition and creative process were not solely motivated by sheer love for the neighborhood. Hussle articulated a responsibility to establish real change outside of his own interest — “me being an influential artist and young and coming from the inner city, it just made sense.”38 Initially, for some, a distinction between love and care may seem to be quite semantic but as Selma Sevenhuijsen said, an ethics of care is a particular “moral practice, a disposition, a daily need, and a way of living.”39 In opposition to individualism and neoliberalism, it is an acknowledgment of vulnerability, interconnectedness, dependency, embodiment, and finitude as basic characteristics of human life.” Hussle seemed to offer a grammar of care focused on capacity building and creative expression, all of which help us live longer and better. To quote Saidiya Hartman, “care, here, is imagined as an antidote to violence.”40

During the twentieth century, Los Angeles developed a strong reputation for providing employment opportunities for underrepresented communities across the board and soon, it became an increasingly popular destination for Black people. There was an allure to the city that seemed to expand the Black economic imagination; Los Angeles seemed to be “a state of mind.”41 As Robin Kelley documented, entertainment in LA, namely Hip Hop, resembled a kind of street ethnography, one that exemplified the quotidian realities of Black life and simultaneously prompted deep engagement with people, place, and the political in a manner that could not be defined by a singular method or approach.42 In the fabric of rapidly changing cities, Black people adopted innovative strategies of belonging to craft a new route toward political representation.43 Los Angeles was no exception.

Some Black communities have embraced a pervasive strand of Black capitalism that equated Black ownership with freedom. Although Hussle urged his community to own their neighborhood, he preached a more nuanced form of entrepreneurial liberation and consumerism. He argued that Crenshaw should “buy back the block,” a mission that looked to move beyond the epic folklore and mythical prowess of Black-owned businesses. Oftentimes, public health discourse has leaned toward extending life, without specific detail to how life is lived. Hussle seemed to articulate that community health is

37 Martin, “Nipsey Hussle Had a Vision.”
38 Evans, “Nipsey Hussle’s Commitment was to his L.A. Neighborhood.”
also about feeling good while alive, living in relation to each other. In a 2013 interview with VladTV, he said, “It is never about the money […] it is about maintaining a connection and respect with the community.”44 He stressed the importance of holding a meeting on a doorstep or front porch to exhibit the possibilities for business to be a public, inclusive endeavor — an ethics centered on interpersonal communication rather than a benevolence of virtue. Care functioned as a selective mode of attention, a space to affirm strength and share joy.

When Tricia Rose reflected on the status of Hip Hop in America, she feared that it had lost the “locally inspired explosion of political exuberance and political energy tethered to the idea of rehabilitating communities.”45 For Rose, Hip Hop seemed ill; it did not seem to care anymore. Although there is no denying the glorification of sexism, homophobia, and violence within some Hip Hop lyrical content, there could also be space for us to consider, as Ralph Ellison once said, that “Power does not have to show off. Power can be confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying.”46 In the era of social media, Hussle optimized his image and worked to ensure that his voice held extramusical cultural heft. Arguably, Hussle became the most notable independent Hip Hop artist of our time.47 He regularly connected with his fanbase on Instagram and Twitter, providing them with an exclusive look at everyday life in the genre.48 Understanding the increased public appreciation of anecdotal evidence, video footage, and street ethnography in contemporary American society, Todd Boyd examined how success in the world of Hip Hop genre is often linked to whether an artist can maintain a consistent, real image.49 In the same 2018 interview with Hot 97, Hussle offered the following: “Look, I am just a student of the game. Period. […] This life is temporary, and you have to give everything you have. You have to empty yourself.”50

Albeit subtle, care ethics is an important departure from the logic of authenticity that has pervaded Hip Hop scholarship. Street life has remained an important conceptual framework in the discipline because of the premise that a gangster is a unique race-class

44 Interview with Nipsey Hussle in 2013: “VladTV Full Interview with Nipsey Hussle (RIP)”: HYPERLINK "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSmjSPAdc40" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSmjSPAdc 40
48 Blay, “Nipsey Hussle’s Work in the Black Community Went Deeper than You Think.”
49 Todd Boyd, Am I Black Enough For You? Popular Culture from the “Hood” and Beyond (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).
50 “Nipsey Hussle on Victory Lap, FDT + Kanye and Ownership,” interview on Hot 97, June 8, 2018, see full interview on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec0uxHUDG8A
rebel, a figure who does not conform neatly to traditional American meritocracy or bootstrap capitalism. Yet, by focusing more on singularity and the individual life of Nipsey Hussle, we attend to what Christina Sharpe termed a “ordinary note of care.”

We bear witness to the atmosphere, the condition of Black life. To examine Hip Hop and care ethics alongside one another is to draw attention to how the genre is continuously used to express an abiding connection to a particular community, to recall the voice of a forgotten street. As Bonnie Honig described, to care is to “cultivate anticipation of another world and to live now dedicated to the task of turning this world into a better one.” Instead of being a passive spectator and consumer in the world as it is, Hussle strived to be an active creator, commencing on a quest beyond the conventional notion of authenticity to construct street credibility, reliability, and extend an intergenerational conversation on cultural preservation. As he said on the track Crenshaw and Slauson (True Story): “I been that [explicit] before the fame happened and repped LA before it came back in. True to this game. Do it big till they remember your name. Hustle.”

Conclusion

Given the dearth of research on the life and legacy of Nipsey Hussle, we hope that our paper can help firmly situate his voice within the field of Hip Hop Studies. Future research should continue to examine his discography as well as explore the diverse politics of health and care across Hip Hop, from Public Enemy to Megan Thee Stallion. When Hip Hop is taken serious ground for political, social, and economic thought, our scholarship is sure to move in an exciting direction. To conclude, we can never forget that Hip Hop is a transnational project. Given his reputation and reach, Nipsey Hussle is evidence of the mutually reinforcing processes of localization and globalization, the kind of care that must be directed toward marginalized, subordinated, and disenfranchised communities in Los Angeles and beyond. “In his music and media coverage, he described Black identity as gangster and global, independence as a Black artist with creative and financial control […].” As Bobby Hundreds said, “Nipsey is everywhere, omnipresent, resurrected day after day, joining communities in Los Angeles and across the globe.” Nipsey Hussle raised the level of communicable work that we should all now be

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51 Sharpe, “And To Survive.”
52 Daniel White Hodge, The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).
56 McFerguson and Durham, “Higher Hussle: Nipsey’s Post Hip Hop Literacies.”
57 Bobby Hundreds, This is Not a T-Shirt: A Brand, a Culture, a Community – A Life in Streetwear. (New York: MCD/ Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).
accountable for. We have no choice but to remain accountable to the vibrancy of his life and legacy.

Hustle.
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“This Ain’t Just a Rap Song”: 2Pac, Sociopolitical Realities and Hip Hop Nation Language

Leah Tonnette Gaines

2Pac’s music was not merely rap songs. His music was and continues to be a platform for communicating important messages and concerns with his audiences. To relay these messages, he often used Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL). In this research, I will conduct a linguistic analysis to illustrate how 2Pac’s music communicated sociopolitical realities through his use of HHNL. To construct possible answers for the questions that guided this work, the researcher transcribed, coded, and analyzed a sample size of 2Pac’s music. From the sample of songs used, the researcher was able to detect three common themes throughout, namely relaying, resisting, and remaining resilient. This paper will present how 2Pac’s music (1) relays sociopolitical messages, (2) calls for resisting sociopolitical oppressions, and (3) urges strong resilience within the Black community.

Introduction and Rationale for Study

For many within my generation, rap music and Hip Hop culture have formed my identity, personality, and sense of self. Almost fifty years after its creation, this rap music continues to narrate the relatable realities of the marginalized and illustrate the artistic expressions of individual rap artists. As a fan of this genre, what mostly appeals to me are the various ways that rap artists creatively use language to incorporate social justice and activism in their music. One specific artist, Tupac Amaru Shakur (born Lesane Parish Crooks; June 16, 1971 – September 13, 1996), performing as 2Pac, often used his music as a platform to communicate social and political concerns with his audiences. His music was more than rap songs; they were messages to his listeners. Although Tupac was most certainly a notable entertainer and artist, it is equally important to remember that he was an activist who utilized his art to publicize his political opinions and beliefs. Though Tupac Shakur passed away in 1996, the messages reflected in his music remain relevant today. With these understandings in mind, this research will conduct a linguistic analysis to illustrate how “this ain’t just a rap song,” but how 2Pac communicated sociopolitical realities through his use of Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL).

Review of Literature

Tupac Shakur was, and is, the lyrical and physical embodiment of social protest. Frequently using vulgar lyrics and expressing himself with profane words, 2Pac was and
is popularly associated with a “gangsta” persona. Yet, more than a mere “rebel without a cause,” 2Pac interpreted his goon personality to be a political statement, and purposely utilized it to disrupt the status quo. Like the practices set in place by the Black Panther Party, 2Pac was brave enough to face America with his militant and radical beliefs. “Tupac saw thug life extending [Black] Panther beliefs in self-defense and class rebellion.” Further, 2Pac was a vocal and self-identified thug, because in the words of Tupac himself, “I’m not scared to say how I feel.” Furthermore, “the image of Tupac Shakur, with his heavily tattooed body and his middle finger in the air, also stands in for black rebellion and dissatisfaction.” In fact, one of his most famous tattoos included the words “thug life” transcribed across the core of his body. Without verbalizing a word, flashing this tattoo was enough for 2Pac to communicate his principles to the public. From his body art to his body language, 2Pac was extremely blunt with his distaste of U.S. society. This thug identity however, existed in conjunction with his other personalities.

An impressive body of work has focused on Tupac’s many, and oftentimes contradicting personalities, behaviors, and lyrical artwork. That is, Tupac exhibited a dualism that varied from being socially conscious, to promoting a thug lifestyle. Even his famous T. H. U. G. L. I. F. E. tattoo, which many interpreted literally (likely because of his public gangsta persona, and meaning of the tattoo before his rebranding of the term “thug life”), was actually an acronym that stood for “The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody.” This duality is further evident in the contradictory messages found between Tupac’s book of poems, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, and songs like “Hit Em Up.” Some scholars align Tupac’s work and legacy with the “trickster” tradition, whose music has convinced many fans that he has cheated death, or never actually died at all. Tupac was prophetic; he connected God to young hip hoppers, linked theology to the

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4 Dyson, *Holler if You Hear Me*, 113.
streets, and merged social justice, spirituality, and Hip Hop. “Tupac embodied both the theological and the profane, while still embodying an Christological persona that permeated much of his art.” In all, Tupac’s legacy is very complex. In addition to Tupac’s multilayered persona, his political beliefs are important to unpack.

For decades, many rappers have connected themselves with and promoted Black Nationalism and Black Nationalist thought. This could link to the popularity of the 1960s Black Power Movement. Challenging U. S. capitalism, Black Nationalism is “the political belief that practice of African Americans as a distinct people with a distinct historical personality who politically should develop structures to define, defend, and develop the interests of Blacks as people.” That is, considering the history, and socio-economic experiences of African Americans, Black Nationalism favors the structural development and well-being of Black people specifically. Affirming his Black Nationalist ideas, Tupac was conscious of the subordination of Black people, recognized the inequities of capitalism, and often-paid tributes to political prisoners who made sacrifices before him. Tupac’s political stance of Black Nationalism is also evident in his membership in Black Nationalist organizations, such as the New Afrikan Panthers. Further, Tupac’s T. H. U. G. L. I. F. E. ideology was comparable to the Black Panther Party’s 10 Point Platform. For example, both political stances proposed community economics, education, and health for Black people. Such social, political, and economic beliefs instilled within a young Tupac, tracing back to his childhood.

For many years, many consider Tupac Shakur, the son of a former Black Panther Party member (Afeni Shakur), and the stepson of a political prisoner (Mutulu Shakur), a “homegrown revolutionary.” Afeni Shakur instilled many of her political ideologies

14 Hodge, Baptized in Dirty Water, xvi.
19 Stanford, “Keepin’ It Real in Hip Hop Politics.”
20 Stanford, “Keepin’ It Real in Hip Hop Politics.”
22 Mutulu Shakur, who is suffering from bone cancer, was released from prison on December 16, 2022. While this seems worthy of celebration, Mutulu Shakur is expected to die from cancer, and was approved to be released from prison because his condition has severely impacted his health.
23 Keeling, “‘A Homegrown Revolutionary?’”
into her son Tupac. Additionally, “Tupac’s exposure to political associates of Afeni contributed to the development and evolution of his political ideas.” That is, Tupac was the godson of slain Black Panther member Geronimo Pratt, the mentee of endless political figures, and a member of prominent political organizations. These relationships and experiences shaped Tupac’s sociopolitical ideology, and set the tone for him to be the metaphorical bridge that connected the gap between sociopolitical activism and rap music.

The connection between Black art and Black life are evident in Hip Hop. Black music genres, as social protest, operate to transform perceptions of history and society, as well as prescribe and mobilize for action. As an extension of this, Hip Hop provides communication, allows creativity, and favors the collective. It is “soul” and “realness,” “rooted in the African and African-American cultures that produced it.” Like African-American culture, rap music has origins in West African culture and communicative practices. This is significant because, as according to Jones (1994), rappers, like West African griots are the orators of their culture, or the living/breathing “archives and libraries” of their communities. African Oration “could include reciting poetry, storytelling, and speaking to drumming and other musical accompaniment. The spoken word was rarely plain, flat and unembellished. Oration always served a dual purpose: to inform and to entertain.” Similar to the African griot, the poetic oration of Tupac serves to both entertain and educate the masses. “Tupac descends from the African storyteller tradition, in which oral artists were referred to as griots.” Both entertaining and informational, rap griot and sociopolitical orator, Tupac Shakur often used African

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31 Jones, Say it Loud!: The Story of Rap Music, 19.
32 Jones, Say it Loud!: The Story of Rap Music, 18.
American Language (AAL)\textsuperscript{34}, and as an extension, HHNL, to discuss the sociopolitical realities of many African Americans.

Because American society largely separates along racial lines, there is also a racial segregation of language (except in some specific integrated spaces).\textsuperscript{35} AAL is one of many terms linguists use to categorize “English-based varieties spoken throughout the United States in African American communities, both rural and urban, south and north, male and female, and spoken among all socioeconomic groups.”\textsuperscript{36} Since many African American people speak AAL,\textsuperscript{37} historically, much controversy has followed the language.\textsuperscript{38} In conjunction with societal beliefs of racial inadequacies, African American speakers of AAL have often had to bear the stereotype of having poor grammar and being less credible because of their cultural vernacular.\textsuperscript{39} In turn, many inaccurately categorize AAL use as a verbal deficiency,\textsuperscript{40} which creates social biases against the language speakers, including both Black children\textsuperscript{41} and adults.\textsuperscript{42} Further, mass media has also portrayed African Americans as unintelligent because of their use of AAL, thus “the media’s presentation of Ebonics reflects the larger society’s perceptions (so often negative) of that which is Black.”\textsuperscript{43} Thus, the dominant society has aligned language use with power and status, to which African Americans and AAL have not greatly benefitted.\textsuperscript{44} Even within such structural confines however, Tupac has used such language to communicate to and for African American communities – most especially through his intentional use of HHNL.

Purpose and Research Question

According to scholar Samy Alim, HHNL characterizes by 10 tenets, and “refers not only to the syntactic constructions of the language but also to the many discursive and communicative practices, the attitudes toward language, understanding the role of language in both binding/bonding community and seizing/smothering linguistic opponents, and language as concept (meaning clothes, facial expressions, body movements, and overall communication).” HHNL encompasses African American Language, African American culture, and the language and culture of the Hip Hop Nation (HHN). This does not mean HHNL solely confines to African American communicative patterns, as the HHN is not exclusively bound to the confines of African American culture. This is evident in the globalized impact of 2Pac’s music and the different varieties of HHNL evident in the HHN. However, it is important to note that Tupac was a speaker of both AAL and HHNL, and therefore this linguistic analysis is steeped in the language that Tupac often engaged in. Hip Hop is more than a solitary culture. Hip Hop is raw, sexual, boastful, radical and reality. Furthermore, Hip Hop simultaneously exemplifies peace and unity, deviance, and a gangsta mindset, incorporating the experiences of pimps and hoes. Hip Hop is educational, linguistic, and is the language of the marginalized. Hip Hop is more than communication; it is liberation and a way of life. For many hip hoppers, “Hip Hop Nation is like ourselves.”

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Most important to this work, HHNL verbalizes sociopolitical circumstances, and flips the script on the power structure of existing power dynamics.\(^{56}\)

Although there is literature on lyrical analyses of Tupac’s work,\(^{57}\) there is a need for more research to specifically center linguistics and Tupac’s use of HHNL in reference to sociopolitical conditions. To expand on this, I would like to examine how 2Pac uses HHNL in his rap music to communicate sociopolitical realities. To guide this research, I have formulated the following research question: How does 2Pac’s music make use of HHNL to communicate sociopolitical realities?

**Positionality, Method/Data Analysis Procedures, and Methodology**

To construct possible answers for my research question, I transcribed, coded, and analyzed a sample size of 2Pac’s music. This section will discuss the methods and data analysis procedures utilized for this study. First unpacking my positionality, I will explain how I come to, and how I situate within, this research. Next, describing the selection process, I will discuss how I chose specific works for this research. Then, outlining the methodology, I will explain the framework used for the linguistic analysis of the chosen pieces. Last, I will discuss how I incorporated additional findings into this research.

While conducting this research, I felt very conflicted. Although Tupac is one of my favorite rappers, I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the controversy that often surrounded 2Pac’s public image and career.\(^{58}\) As a researcher, scholar, and Black woman, I have had to reconcile the many personalities and representations of 2Pac. On one hand, 2Pac was a lyrical genius, who was critical of the racist society that he lived in.\(^{59}\) Thus, I have a high level of respect for 2Pac’s music, body of work, and positive contributions to society. Yet to be consistent with my values, I remain critical of his misdeeds as well. On the other hand, Tupac Shakur was a convicted sex offender, charged for a crime committed against a Black woman.\(^{60}\) In 1995, Tupac received a prison sentence for sexual abusing a Black woman.\(^{61}\) Although he maintained he was innocent \(^{62}\)

\(^{56}\) Alim, “Hip Hop Nation Language,” 394–95.


denied the sexual assault allegations;63 a court of law still found him guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. More recently, in 2018, the victim of this crime participated in an interview where she recollected all events that were once in question.64 During the interview, she recalled very vivid details of her attack, which were heartbreaking to hear. Even further, much of 2Pac's music reflects the sexism and misogyny that is often prevalent in mainstream rap music and throughout commercialized mainstream American culture.65 While I see Tupac as a hero that is worthy of praise, I also see him as a person whose sudden death stunted his ability to grow in life. Discussing my conflicted feelings is necessary within this research and it is my hope that this allows the reader to understand that I approached this research as a Black woman who simultaneously loves Hip Hop and who understands the misogyny is common within popular culture. I did not approach this research to romanticize or idolize Tupac but to understand how some of his language use reflects the tenets of HHNL.

Before his death, 2Pac released five studio albums. Those albums include 2Pacalypse Now (1991), Strictly 4 My N. I. G. G. A. Z. (1993), Me Against the World (1995), All Eyez on Me (1996), and The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory (1996). To analyze a sample of Tupac’s robust work, I used these five albums and chose two to three songs per CD. The chosen songs released as singles, were amongst the popular songs on the airwaves during Tupac’s time, or songs that continue to receive frequent radio play today. These were purposeful decisions, as these songs were and are more likely to reach a larger audience because of their airplay, promotion, and popularity. To make an argument that Tupac was a sociopolitical orator, I thought it important to include his work that had the largest listening audience. Because All Eyez on Me is a 2-disc album, I chose two to three songs per disc, which amounted to six songs chosen from the entire album. All other albums consulted were single disc records, so only two to three songs were chosen from the remaining four titles. The songs chosen from each album include: 2Pacalypse Now (1991): “Trapped,” and “Brenda’s Got a Baby”; Strictly 4 My N. I. G. G. A. Z. (1993): “Keep Ya Head Up,” “Holler if Ya Hear Me,” and “I Get Around”; Me Against the World (1995): “Me Against the World,” “Dear Mama,” and “Temptations”; All Eyez on Me (1996), disc 1: “How Do U Want It?,” “I Ain’t Mad at Cha,” “2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted”; All Eyez on Me (1996), disc 2: “All Eyez on Me,” “Thug Passion,” and “Ratha Be Ya Nigga”; and The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory (1996): “Against All Odds,” “Hail Mary,” and “To Live and Die in L.A.”

To conduct a linguistic analysis of the songs, I consulted the Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) framework shaped by Alim.66 This framework allowed me to code

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63 Tupac Shakur, “VIBE Presents: Tupac’s ‘Lost’ Interview,” Vibe Magazine channel on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4zAdiWMG1Q.
64 “Ayanna Jackson on Meeting 2Pac, Sexual Assault, Trial, Aftermath (Full Interview),” Ayanna Jackson interviewed by Vladimir Lyubovny (DJ Vlad), February 13, 2008, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CVBOv9O1GA
65 Kitwana, The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture.
the transcribed songs for common themes of HHNL. Coding for the 10 tenets of HHNL, I determined the most common tenet used by Tupac throughout the songs. In the next section, I will discuss the major findings of this work. Although not reflected in the major findings of this research, I will introduce tenets of HHNL that are not included in the major findings. These supplemental findings will support the major findings.

Findings

“HHNL is inextricably linked with the sociopolitical circumstances that engulf the HHN,” and therefore, “rappers are insightful examiners of the sociopolitical matrix within which HHNL operates.” With this understanding, I was able to detect many sociopolitical realities orated by 2Pac. From the sample of songs used in this research, I was able to detect three common, sometimes overlapping, themes throughout relaying, resisting, and remaining resilient. Here I will present how 2pac’s music: 1) relays sociopolitical messages, 2) calls for resisting sociopolitical oppressions, and 3) urges and recognizes strong resilience within the Black community.

Relaying

Acting as a messenger of the streets, much of 2Pac’s language use relays many of the sociopolitical realities experienced by Black people that reside within Black American communities and neighborhoods. In other words, 2Pac’s music conveys the social and political realities of the Hip Hop Nation (HHN) to his listeners. Tupac expresses relaying in the songs “Trapped,” “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” and “All Eyez on Me.”

Being a member of the community that he identified as oppressed, as well as a victim of police brutality, Tupac used HHNL to communicate his anger with oppressed and oppressor relationships. “Trapped,” narrates the realities of police harassment, police brutality, incarceration, and other oppressions experienced by most Black communities.

They got me trapped
Can barely walk the city streets
Without a cop harassing me, searching me
Then asking my identity
Hands up, throw me up against the wall
Didn't do a thing at all
Tellin you one day these suckers gotta fall

Cuffed up throw me on the concrete
Coppers try to kill me

Being “trapped” expresses the sentiment of many African American people within inner cities. Many African Americans have reported a routine of feeling like a suspect. Being “trapped” expresses the sentiment of many African American people within inner cities. Many African Americans have reported a routine of feeling like a suspect. Distrust of the police is correlated with both concentrated neighborhood disadvantage and personal experiences with negative and involuntary police contacts. Examples of historical policing are “the stop-and-frisk rule,” which made it “constitutionally permissible to stop, question, and frisk him or her—even in the absence of probable cause.” Such practices of racial profiling unfairly targeted African Americans. It is evident that being “trapped,” or caught in a cycle and experiencing constant policing, is a much-documented negative sociopolitical experience for many African American people.

In addition to police harassment and police brutality, 2Pac also relays the realities experienced by some adolescent Black girls. Understanding the sociopolitical climate, 2Pac narrates the story of a twelve-year-old girl that is seemingly in a sexual relationship with an adult male, and who consequently becomes pregnant. That is, “Brenda’s Got a Baby” relays some young women’s experiences with statutory rape and unwanted child pregnancy.

Now Brenda's belly is gettin' bigger
But no one seems to notice any change in her figure
She's 12 years old and she's having a baby
In love with the molester, who's sexing her crazy
And yet she thinks that he’ll be with her forever
And dreams of a world with the two of them are together,
Whatever, he left her, and she had the baby solo
She had it on the bathroom floor and didn’t know so
She didn't know, what to throw away and what to keep
She wrapped the baby up and threw him in the trash heap

Every state has some of law on statutory rape, which curbs teenage pregnancies and protects naïve and vulnerable youth from adult exploitation and coercion. The exploitation and coercion of experienced by many young girls parallels that of “Brenda”

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who become pregnant by men, not boys or minors.\textsuperscript{75} Although there are social support programs for the teenage mothers,\textsuperscript{76} many of these pregnant teenagers will likely face life-long challenges. “Long-term consequences of teenage motherhood include lower educational attainment, socioeconomic disadvantage, greater psychosocial difficulties, and higher rates of marital instability and single parenthood.”\textsuperscript{77} As relayed by 2Pac, Brenda was in a cycle of poverty, with very little options to get out of her situation. The tragic end to Brenda’s misfortune was prostitution, and ultimately her early death. A multilayered and tragic reality, statutory rape is a huge socio-political concern.

To escape poverty and economic hardships, some turn to crime, while others will boast they possess material or tangible wealth. In a capitalist society, money and the social economy are political. “Rap lyrics create a particular economic sphere, one with its own symbolic values, its own vernacular, and most importantly, its own politics.”\textsuperscript{78} This often illustrates via braggadocio, and the discussions of criminal lifestyles. This overlapping narrative of an underground career and a boss style of life are common in 2Pac’s music. The relaying of a criminal and flashy lifestyle, whether real or imagined, is evident in “All Eyez on Me.”\textsuperscript{79}

\begin{verbatim}
Was hyper as a kid, cold as a teenager
On my mobile, callin’ big shots on the scene major
Packin’ hundreds in my drawers, fuck the law
Bitches, I fuck with a passion, I’m livin’ rough and raw
Catchin’ cases at a fast rate, ballin’ in the fast lane
Hustle ’til the mornin’, never stopped until the cash came
Live my life as a thug nigga until the day I die
Live my life as a boss player, ’cause even getting’ high
These niggas got me tossin’ shit
I put the top down, now it’s time to floss my shit
Keep your head up, nigga, make these mothafuckas suffer
Up in the Benz, burnin’ rubber
The money is mandatory, the hoes is for the stress
This criminal lifestyle, equipped with a bulletproof vest
Make sure your eyes is on the meal ticket, get your money
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{78} Alf Mikael Rehn and David Sköld, “All About the Benjamins–Hardcore Rap, Conspicuous Consumption and the Place of Bragging in Economic Language,” paper presented at CMS 3 Conference, 2003.
Mothafucka, let’s get rich and we’ll kick it; all eyes on me

Some of the bragging, boasting, and showcasing that goes occurs in Hip Hop culture, is sometimes fiction, rather than truth as artists often must negotiate between the business of rap (what sells) and the art. Regardless, this bravado can serve as a reflective fantasy of the real-life experiences that some have or desire to have. When “All Eyez on Me” saw its release in the 1990s, cell phones were not widespread or affordable, neither were Mercedes Benz vehicles. Therefore, 2Pac is using language to relay that he enjoys a rich life – a life to which most Americans were not privy. His “boss life” accomplishments relay to people who possibly strive for similar endeavors and notoriety. Therefore, Tupac is speaking to a larger community of people who either respect, aspire to join, or are within a similar lifestyle. True to the sociopolitical milieu, style, wealth, luxurious items, and a gangsta persona are social and political factors that are worthy of bragging rights, trend setting, and public emulation.

Although this section considers the way that 2Pac relayed sociopolitical realities in just a few of his songs, one can find similar language in many songs sampled for this research. This includes the relaying of his social, frequent, and short-term relationships with women in “I Get Around,” “Temptations,” “How Do U Want It,” “Thug Passion,” and “Ratha Be Ya Nigga.” The relaying of neighborhood and familial realities are evident in “Keep Ya Head Up,” “Holler if Ya Hear Me,” “Me Against the World,” “Dear Mama,” “I Aint Mad at Cha,” and “To Live and Die in L.A.” The social experiences of living lavishly gangsta relay in “2 of Amerikas Most Wanted.” Last, Tupac relays sociopolitical conflict in “Against All Odds,” and internal and external conflict in “Hail Mary.”

Resisting

Hip Hop can be empowering because it encourages resistance. Along with relaying, or communicating the sociopolitical realities of local neighborhoods, 2Pac called on community members to resist sociopolitical oppressions. In other words, 2Pac does not believe that Black people should willingly accept subjugation or inequity. Instead, 2Pac promoted a means of fighting back, called for defiance, and encouraged combating social and political oppressions evident in some Black communities.

Provided here are some examples, as stressed in “Holler if Ya Hear Me,” To Live and Die in L.A.,” and “How Do U Want It?”

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84 Shakur, “Tupac Revolutionary Speech.”
Tupac was a proponent of armed self-defense and encouraged members of Black communities to do the same.\(^85\) Featured on his second studio album, “Holler if Ya Hear Me”\(^86\) is a song of sociopolitical resistance. Using HHNL, Tupac suggests specific resistances needed for change. Instead of being killed by police officers, Tupac suggests violent uprising.

I guess cause I’m Black born  
I’m supposed to say peace, sing songs, and get capped on  
But it’s time for a new plan, BAM!  
I’ll be swingin like a one man clan  
Here we go, turn it up, don’t stop  
To my homies on the block gettin dropped by cops  
I’m still around for ya  
Keepin my sound underground for ya  
And I’m a throw a change up  
Quayle, like you never brought my name up  
Now my homies in the backstreets, the blackstreets  
They feel me when they rollin in they fat jeeps  
This ain’t just a rap song, a Black song  
Tellin all my brothers, get they strap on  
And look for me in the struggle  
Hustlin ’til other brothers bubble

Historically, many white Americans prefer that Black people not resist sociopolitical oppressions because “Black protest represents a devastating threat to the image most white Americans have of their society and their roles in it.”\(^87\) In fact, many white people were opposed civil rights protests of the 1960s.\(^88\) More recently, following the injuries and eventual death of Freddie Gray, the majority of White America responded fairly similarly to the 2015 Baltimore protests (largely popularized by the media as the “Baltimore riots”). Instead of attempting to understand institutional racism and reasons why the youth of Baltimore were so upset, many white Americans took to their social media accounts to refer to the protestors as thugs and criminals.\(^89\) Tupac understood the politics of white America’s preference for submissive and oppressed Blacks, over Blacks who are self-

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\(^85\) Tupac Shakur, “Tupac Shakur 1994 Exclusive Interview with Ed Gordon,” interviewed by Ed Gordon, BET Networks channel on YouTube, June 16, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ab3v0GfgvrA


empowered and resisting sociopolitical circumstances. Calling for an armed resistance to oppression, Tupac supported the disruption of an oppressive society, by any means necessary, even if such disruption is against the preference and interests of the majority population.

According to the dominant perspective, to receive the label “thug” was negative because it meant that the individual was a menace to society. Tupac however, held respect and admiration for those that the dominant society deemed thugs, as many of those “thugs” were his mentors, father figures, and support system. Tupac understood the thug narrative, and flipped the power dynamics by making “thug” an empowering identity. For 2Pac, “Thugs” were brave resisters with a long history of protecting their humanity. He did this with his own image, his T. H. U. G. L. I. F. E. tattoo, and with the use of HHNL (“To Live and Die in L.A.”)

I love Cali like I love women
Cause every nigga in L.A. got a little bit of thug in him
We might fight amongst each other, but I promise you this:
We’ll burn this bitch down, get us pissed

In an ode to this West coast city, 2Pac acknowledges challenges within LA neighborhoods, but ultimately, the people in the neighborhood will stand together against injustice. Often referred to as “thugs” on the news and in media, neighborhood protestors in LA have been known to burn everything at the face of racial injustice. In fact, in 1965, the residents of the LA Watts neighborhood could no longer accept racism or police brutality, and the tensions erupted into a multi-day riot. By the end of the rebellion, many businesses were burnt some lives were lost, and many were injured. Nearly three decades later, the city went up in flames again; following the police beating of Rodney Glen King (April 2, 1965 – June 17, 2012), and the death of Latasha Harlins (January 1, 1976 – March 16, 1991), a 15-year old Black girl that died at the hands of Soon Ja Du (Korean: 두순자), a 51-year-old Korean-American convenience store owner. Ultimately, 2Pac understood power relations between the dominant society and the

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90 Tupac Shakur, “Tupac on Growing up Poor, His Rise to Fame & His Future,” MTV News channel on YouTube, 1995; Sept. 13, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpPbYGjRg0Q
94 Matei and Ball-Rokeach, “Watts, the 1965 Los Angeles Riots.”
marginalized and that no one could take that power away. In other words, 2Pac used HHNL to communicate resistance.

Although Tupac believed that racist systems and socio-political inequities were factors that oppressed members of African American communities, others believed that rap music was the number one threat to African American communities (and American society in general). During the 1990s – the peak of Tupac’s career – a group of American politicians started a campaign against commercialized rap music. The 42nd president of the United States, President William Jefferson “Bill” Clinton, made the charge that rappers were socially irresponsible.96 The former Secretary of State for Pennsylvania and a delegate to the White House Conference on Civil Rights, Cynthia Delores Tucker (known as C. Delores Tucker; October 4, 1927 – October 12, 2005) denounced rap music as “violent and misogynistic.”97 Robert Joseph Dole (known as Bob Dole; (July 22, 1923 – December 5, 2021) condemned not only rap music, but also the companies that support and benefit from the music.98 Some Black leaders at the time, such as William “Bill” Cosby and Jesse Jackson, were similarly vocal against Tupac’s “womanizing” music.99 This public conversation did not end in the 1990s, as Hip Hop still receives criticism for shaming and objectifying women, and encouraging violence against women.100 Tupac resisted this narrative that rap was public enemy number one in “How Do U Want It?”101 Using HHNL, Tupac explains that he, Hip Hop, nor Hip Hop artists are the enemies of Black people.

C. Delores Tucker, you’s a motherfucker
Instead of tryin' to help a nigga, you destroy a brother
Worse than the others, Bill Clinton, Mr. Bob Dole
You're too old to understand the way the game's told
You're lame, so I gotta hit you with the hot facts
Once I'm released, I'm makin' millions, niggas top that
They wanna censor me, they'd rather see me in a cell
Livin' in hell, only a few of us'll live to tell
Now everybody talkin 'bout us, I could give a fuck

Like we the first ones to bomb and cuss
Nigga, tell me how you want it

Conveniently expressed in a sexually suggestive track toward women, 2Pac claims he is not behaving in an irresponsible way toward the Black community, but through presenting his music, is doing his job. Addressing some politicians by name, 2Pac accused the democrats, republicans, and all those in-between, of censorship. Dismissing the political criticisms, Tupac acknowledges the hypocrisy, because the people before him have, and those after him will continue to produce similarly vulgar music. This is evident in Country and Heavy Metal music; however, politicians have not attacked those genres of music, or the genres’ artists. Even in Opera music, women “are usually portrayed as wanton and shallow and easily manipulated for sexual purposes.” 2Pac’s resistance here seems to be that despite the negative criticism, he will continue to make money from his music, even on a sexually suggestive track. Although Tupac is no longer alive, African American communities continue to battle social, economic, and political challenges and inequities.

One can also find direct and indirect resistance in multiple songs sampled in this research. Resistance is evident in Tupac’s attempts to resist women in “Temptations”; Resistance to police brutality in “Trapped”; Resistance to social and political detractors in “Against All Odds”; Resistance to defeat in “2 of Amerikas Most Wanted,” and in “Hail Mary”; Resistance by hustling in “All Eyez on Me,” and Resistance to the opposition in “Against All Odds.”

Resilience

Last, in addition to relaying sociopolitical truths and encouraging the resistance of sociopolitical challenges, 2Pac uses language to describe and encourage the resilience of the Black community. His music ensures his listeners that we will all remain strong, that through it all we always bounce back, and as a collective, we continue to survive such oppressive realities. This can be seen in “Keep Ya Head Up,” “2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted,” and “Me Against the World.”

“Keep Ya Head Up,” recognizes common struggles experienced by many members of urban communities and uses these collective narratives to convince the audience that things will indeed get better. The language here acknowledges systemic oppressions but insists that we cannot allow such inequities to break us. Instead, we must continue to survive.

103 Stoia, Adams, and Drakulich, “Rap Lyrics as Evidence,” 331.
We ain’t meant to survive cause this a setup
And even though you’re fed up
Huh, ya got to keep your head up
(Chorus) Keep ya head up, ooh, child, things are gonna get easier
Keep ya head up, ooh, child, things’ll get brighter

The struggle communicated through much of rap is rooted in “the pain of black-American experience, which began with slavery,” and exists in society today. Surviving such pain is evidence of continued resiliency. “After experiencing some of the most brutal forms of injustice and dehumanization in U.S. history, African Americans continue to survive and function with remarkable resiliency,” and “this tenacity for survival is embedded in the history of African American resistance and an intense desire to be free.” Tupac was cognizant of both systemic oppressions and Black resiliency, and uses HHNL to remind his listeners that they are indeed a resilient people.

Tupac also demonstrated resilience through the communication of his personal experiences. Using his lived reality as an example, “2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted” incorporated HHNL to share resilience of sociopolitical challenges.

They wonder how I live with five shots
Niggas is hard to kill on my block!
Schemes for currency and dough-related
Affiliated with the hustlers, so we made it
No answers to questions, I’m trying to get up on it
My nigga Dogg wit’ me, eternally the most wanted

In 1994, Tupac was robbed and shot five times. In the United States, approximately 100,000 people receive wounds from gun violence each year, and more survive gun violence than die from it. However, those that survive gun violence generally have some lingering trauma and feel a constant compromising of their life and

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105 Jones, Say it Loud!: The Story of Rap Music, 20.
safety. Although probably suffering from similar psychological effects of being a victim to gun violence, Tupac was resilient. In other words, Tupac’s language use explains that he can be resilient because he comes from the strength of survival, street life resilience. Not only did he outlive this attempt on his life, but also he remained resilient with the support of his community. His support system was especially strong from his friend and former labelmate, Snoop Dog.

Also, according to 2Pac, even when one feels alone in the world, they can continue to be resilient. Using HHNL to communicate the horrors of society, “Me Against the World” provides a formula for being resilient through a challenging life.

With all this extra stressin'
The question I wonder is after death, after my last breath
When will I finally get to rest through this oppression?
They punish the people that’s askin' questions
And those that possess, steal from the ones without possessions
The message I stress, to make it stop study your lessons
Don’t settle for less, even the genius asks-es questions
Be grateful for blessings
Don’t ever change, keep your essence
The power is in the people and politics we address
Always do your best, don’t let the pressure make you panic
And when you get stranded
And things don’t go the way you planned it
Dreamin' of riches, in a position of makin' a difference
Politicians and hypocrites, they don't wanna listen

Tupac seems to promote resilience by advocating for education, political power, and hard work. Historically, African Americans have used such self-help tactics by educating Black communities, creating political parties, and gathering voters to be resilient through socio-political oppressions. This was evident in the organization of freedom

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schools,\textsuperscript{118} the Black Panther Party,\textsuperscript{119} and voter registration drives.\textsuperscript{120} This legacy continues today through the efforts, service, and activisms of Black Motherwork,\textsuperscript{121} grassroots organizations,\textsuperscript{122} National Pan-Hellenic Council Greek Lettered Organizations,\textsuperscript{123} churches,\textsuperscript{124} and other regional, national, and international groups. Tupac did not ignore the fact that many African Americans face inequity and used his knowledge of the HHN to encourage them, while providing his perspective on solutions to sociopolitical problems: self and community empowerment and advancement.

Tupac also communicates resilience in other songs. Some include surviving through struggle in “Holler if Ya Hear Me,” “Me Against the World,” and “Dear Mama.” Tupac shares his resilience through social and political criticism in “How Do U Want It,” and in “All Eyez on Me.” Tupac explains remaining resilient from oppositional attack in “Against all Odds,” and being resilient through intrapersonal and interpersonal challenges in “Hail Mary.”

**Additional Findings**

The data collected for this research provided many examples of the way 2Pac communicated sociopolitical concerns and highlighted multiple tenets of HHNL. Although this research does not require them to be deconstructed fully, I think it is important to at least note that language throughout the songs included in this research also included rich aspects of HHNL. Supportive of the major findings of this research, the table below illustrates several examples of such features.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Selby, *Freedom Libraries: The Untold Story of Libraries for African Americans in the South*.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Adrienne L. Edwards, “(Re) Conceptualizing Black Motherwork as Political Activism,” *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 14, no. 3 (2022): 404–11, https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12469
\item \textsuperscript{124} Sandra L. Barnes, “Black Church Culture and Community Action,” *Social Forces* 84, no. 2 (2005): 967–94.
\end{itemize}
| Tenet 1: HHNL has its roots in AAL (Alim 2004). | Because HHNL is spoken by African Americans, it is therefore rooted in the culture and language of its creators, African Americans/AAL. “The language of hip-hop is African American Language” (Smitherman 1997, 7). This can be seen in 2Pac’s use of the existential “it,” and zero copula in “Dear Mama” (Shakur 1995b). | Existential “it”: “It’s a struggle every day, gotta roll on”
Zero copula: “You [are] in the kitchen tryin to fix us a hot plate” |
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<td>Tenet 2: HHNL is one language variety used by African Americans (Alim 2004).</td>
<td>African Americans are fluent in many language varieties, and HHNL is just one of those varieties. Rappers are also fluent in the Language of Wider Communication, and they often switch back and forth between language varieties in which they are fluent. This is evident in “Brenda’s Got a Baby” (Shakur 1991b).</td>
<td>“I hear Brenda’s got a baby. But Brenda’s barely got a brain. A damn shame, the girl can hardly spell her name. (That’s not our problem, that’s up to Brenda’s family). Well let me show you how it affects our whole community.”</td>
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<td>Tenet 4: HHNL is a unique language of its own (Alim 2004).</td>
<td>The language has its own “grammar, lexicon, and phonology, as well as unique communicative styles” (Alim 2004, 394). An example of HHNL grammar is the use of “illin,” which 2Pac uses it to refer to “tripping,” acting crazy, or not usual. This is seen in “Me Against the World” (Shakur 1995a).</td>
<td>“Carries to children ‘cause they’re illin’”</td>
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<td>Tenet 5: HHNL is a combination of music and literature (Alim 2004).</td>
<td>“HHNL is simultaneously the spoken, poetic, lyrical, and musical expression of the HHN” (Alim 2004, 394). This is evident in the poetic imagery delivered by 2Pac in “Hail Mary” (Shakur 1996h).</td>
<td>“Picture paragraphs unloaded, wise words bein quoted. Peeped the weakness in the rap game and sewed it (or “disown it/sowed it,” as various sources cite the lyric differently). Bow down.”</td>
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<td>Tenet 8: HHNL reflects the regional variation of its</td>
<td>Because California is one of the places that had a strong impact on Tupac’s language use and culture,</td>
<td>“Better learn about the dress code, B’s and C’s.”</td>
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speakers (Alim 2004). His songs written during his time there reflect this. “To Live and Die in LA” (Shakur 1996i) for example, uses language to discuss the gang culture that developed in the area. All them other niggas copycats, these is G’s.”

**Tenet 9:** HHNL operates as a mechanism of communication between the members of HHN (Alim 2004).

Rap music is a platform for rappers to talk amongst each other or send messages to each other. Tupac utilizes “Against All Odds” to remind Dr. Dre of old beef, to intimidate Mobb Deep, and to threaten or challenge Puff Daddy. In other words, Tupac uses “Against All Odds” (1996g) as a mechanism to communicate a direct message to other members of the HHN. “You living fantasies, nigga I reject your deposit. We shook Dre punk ass, now we out of the closet. Mobb Deep wonder why nigga blew them out. Next time grown folks talk, nigga close your mouth. Peep me, I take this war shit deeply. Done seen too many real players fall to let these bitch niggas beat me. Puffy lets be honest you a punk or you will see me with gloves. Remember that shit you said to Vibe about me bein a thug.”

**Tenet 10:** HHNL incorporates sociopolitical realities and experiences (Alim 2004).

“HHNL is inextricably linked with the sociopolitical circumstances that engulf the HHN,” and therefore, “rappers are insightful examiners of the sociopolitical matrix within which HHNL operates” (Alim 2004, 394). This can be observed in “All Eyez on Me” (1996d). “The feds is watchin, niggaz plottin to get me. Will I survive, will I die? Come on let’s picture the possibility. Givin me charges, lawyers makin a grip. I told the judge I was raised wrong, and that’s why I blaze shit. Was hyper as a kid, cold as a teenager.”

**Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations**

Because of the poetic oration used by 2Pac, many consider Tupac Shakur a sociopolitical orator of Black experiences. In his music, 2Pac used HHNL to become a rap griot. Although released decades ago, 2Pac’s music continues to reflect relevant realities present in society today. Using HHNL, 2Pac relayed sociopolitical truths, urged the
resistance of sociopolitical oppressions, and encouraged the resilience of the Black community against sociopolitical injustices. This is evident in his discussions of police brutality and harassment, his call for counterattacking oppressions, and his reassurance of the Black community’s strength to continue surviving. Tupac was an avid social activist, whose legacy and activisms continue to live on through the teachings of his music. His music is symbolic and provides the awareness needed to spark change amongst the masses.

This linguistic analysis adds to the existing literature on HHNL and examinations of Tupac’s work and experiences. While providing significant information, this piece does have limitations. The Hip Hop Nation is global, expands outside the US and throughout the diaspora, and transcends racial and ethnic boundaries yet, this research is largely African American centered. Future studies can examine Tupac’s language use and impact from a more global perspective. In addition, this research only includes information from a portion of the songs released before Tupac’s death. An all-inclusive study could assess every song on the five albums to better understand how all of the music released before his death does or does not exhibit aspects of HHNL. Other research conducted could yield varying results, as findings could reflect different tenets of HHNL. After all, since art and language are subjects of interpretation, understandings of HHNL and primary sources could vary. Future research could also build upon this work by examining sociopolitical examples throughout Tupac’s body of music. Future comparative studies might also consider some of the similarities and differences that distinguish the HHNL used by Tupac and other rap artists. Finally, rather than just using music created by Tupac, further research could consult interviews, speeches, poetry, and other primary sources that could provide insight on Tupac’s use of HHNL.

In conclusion, the stories and narratives of the oppressed are extremely relevant and very necessary. Communicating the everyday realities of such groups could lead to serious conversations around solutions, could make space for prevention of such oppressions, or could encourage the much-needed discussions of resistances required for the subjugated. For example, better understanding the cycle of mass incarceration, the systemic oppression of Black people, and the experiences of teenage mothers could prompt resolutions, deterrence, or counter responses, all of which could be connected to some of Tupac’s (possibly prophetic) music and activisms.

Bibliography


Jackson, Ayanna. “Ayanna Jackson on Meeting 2Pac, Sexual Assault, Trial, Aftermath (Full Interview).” Interviewed by Vladimir Lyubovny (DJ Vlad). February 13, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CVBOv9O1GA


Discography

It’s “Hip Hop,” Not “hip-hop”

Tasha Iglesias and Travis Harris

“It’s ‘Hip Hop,’ Not ‘hip-hop’” explains how two Hip Hop scholars, Tasha Iglesias and Travis Harris, collaborated to get the official academic spelling of Hip Hop changed from “hip-hop” to “Hip Hop.” While they were graduate students, they grew frustrated with reading numerous academic texts that did not represent Hip Hop in the same way the culture did outside of academia. Iglesias and Harris are Hip Hop and involved with the culture outside of the classroom. The clash between these two worlds led them to petition the American Psychological Association and eventually speak with Merriam Webster dictionary to change the spelling. In September 2019, APA put out a statement regarding hyphens and proper nouns thereby allowing “hip-hop” to be spelled “Hip Hop.” This article includes two primary sources, the official statement Harris and Iglesias co-authored and the email exchanges with APA and Merriam Webster.

Hip Hop is an African diasporic phenomenon not bound by space and time and is made up of a collective consciousness from global cultures. Hip Hop is a culture. I (Iglesias) grew up in Hip Hop; I was also a Hip Hop promoter in the early 2000s. In those days we promoted events or shows by handing out flyers, or by sending a text or email. I was constantly handing out flyers that had Hip Hop written on them or was writing Hip Hop in an email or text. In all these instances, as well as within the culture, Hip Hop was spelled as two words and was capitalized without a hyphen. I will note, however, that some flyers from the past did not capitalize Hip Hop; I would be dishonest if I did not address this. But one could only imagine the shock I had when trying to write Hip Hop using Microsoft Word and finding out that the way I spelled my culture was incorrect according to various organizations. These organizations included the American Psychological Association (APA) and Merriam Webster Dictionary, organizations that mandated how I write Hip Hop in academic text.

Prior to writing my dissertation in 2019, I (Iglesias) did not know that how I spelled Hip Hop was incorrect according to these governing bodies. I became increasingly aware however as I received feedback and inquired about the blue squiggly lines underneath the words “Hip Hop.” At the time, I voiced my frustrations to my friend and colleague, Harris. We were both graduate students completing our dissertations and experiencing the same issue. I (Harris) was also frustrated with the way it was being spelled. I grew tired of reading “hip-hop” in academic text after academic text. What frustrated me the most was that those outside of Hip Hop determined how to spell Hip Hop. We did not want to assimilate and adhere to these requirements. We decided to directly argue for the ability to write and spell our culture in an authentic manner.1

1 Tasha Iglesias, “It’s ‘Hip Hop’ not ‘Hip-Hop,’” August 6, 2020, (Social Media Post), Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/drtashaiglesias/posts/pfbid02CGuHzChutyKAnmhjpmNemDUTj7VEEHWgDKXHrKQ8sJkirm2DZ4j2bqVHFHwQV5H1
We challenged the APA and Merriam Webster Dictionary in 2019 and asked that Hip Hop be capitalized and that the hyphen requirement be dropped.\textsuperscript{2} First we coauthored an official statement (see below) and shared this statement with academics and those in the culture. With our official statement and Hip Hop behind us, we successfully petitioned and had the guidelines changed. We argued that Hip Hop is a culture by definition and as a result is considered a proper noun and must be capitalized. We challenged the use of a hyphen because members of Hip Hop often write “Hip Hop” without a hyphen. In September 2019, APA published a new style guide, “Hyphenation Principles.”\textsuperscript{3} This style allows for compound words to be written as two separate words without the hyphen.

In the grand scheme of the many issues confronting us, this was a relatively small victory, but our fight was purely Hip Hop. We challenged institutions that sought to censor and oppress how we express ourselves in the culture. Every time Hip Hop is properly spelled, every time Hip Hop is published in any academic texts, every time a student or professor acknowledges the spelling “Hip Hop” and not “hip-hop,” these instances continually point to our ability to come together, make changes and define who we are as Hip Hop. We are Hip Hop and can now officially spell it that way.

\textsuperscript{2} See the emails below following the official statement.
Hip Hop Spelling Official Statement

Hip Hop is Hip Hop. This phenomenon can only be described by looking within itself. Hip Hop is multi-dimensional, multi-faceted, fresh, dynamic, life giving, inspiring, revolutionary, complex, and creative. A holistic depiction of all that Hip Hop is necessitates that Hip Hop is properly identified. While what scholars and those in the culture mean by “Hip Hop” is constantly in contention with what everyone agrees on is its complexity. As such, imperative to presenting this complex nature of Hip Hop is its spelling. Lawrence “KRS One” Parker has proposed spelling Hip Hop in three different ways, in order to account for the various notions of Hip Hop: Hiphop, Hip Hop and hip-hop (40 years of Hip Hop by KRS-One—Full Movie). KRS One contends that “hip-hop” is only the products of the culture “Hip Hop.” “Hiphop” gets at the true essence of what Hip hop truly is, which KRS One identifies as collective consciousness. KRS One’s spellings of Hip Hop do not have to serve as the final word on how we define Hip Hop but it is beneficial in thinking about the various complexities of what we mean by “Hip Hop.”

Currently, the Journal of Hip Hop Studies (JHHS) uses the spelling “Hip Hop.” The American Psychological Association (APA) citation and format style enforces the spelling “hip-hop.” JHHS, Hip Hop Studies Association (HHSA) and the undersigned contend for the spelling “Hip Hop” to be the standard academic spelling of Hip Hop. We posit that this is the standard for two reasons: “hip-hop” does not adequately address the conceptions of Hip Hop and Hip Hop must define for itself how it should be spelled. Going along with KRS One’s breakdown of Hip Hop, “hip-hop” only accounts for the products of the Hip Hop culture. In fact, that has been a problem with some Hip Hop scholarship; it has focused too much on the products, especially rap music, and not the culture. Therefore, in order to move beyond this myopic perspective of Hip Hop, the spelling needs to change from hip-hop to Hip Hop. Secondly, the fabric and foundation of Hip Hop’s identity was and still is self-expression in the midst of chaos. African diasporic youth in South Bronx, New York developed an identity and culture amid literal burning buildings. When the world told them they were nobodies, they banded together and a revolutionary life force flowed, swelled up, and burst, or rather boomed through Hip Hop. Hip Hop scholars call upon the APA and any other academic organization to allow Hip Hop to identify itself. Hip Hop is not just the product and is more than a culture. Hip Hop is Hip Hop.

4 KRS One “40 Years of Hip Hop by KRS-One—Full Movie,” YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBGjPebfq74
Email Exchange between Tasha Iglesias and American Psychological Association and Merriam-Webster

From: Tasha Iglesias

Sent: Wednesday, July 3, 2019 12:00 PM

To: StyleExpert@apa.org <StyleExpert@apa.org>

Subject: RE: Request Change by APA

Dear Whomever it May Concern,

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to request the procedure for requesting a change by APA on the correct format of the word Hip Hop. Per APA, Hip Hop should be written as Hip-Hop. We would like to submit a request with signatures from those who created the Hip Hop culture to write the culture’s name without a hyphen in academic papers. Please let me know what is needed in order to formally present this request to APA.

Sincerely,

Tasha Iglesias

From: <@m-w.com>

Sent: Thursday, July 11, 2019 8:36 AM

To: tasha.iglesias

Subject: RE: Question/Comment About a Definition

Dear Tasha,

Thank you for your comments about the spelling of the word “hip-hop.” Our job as definers is to provide an accurate reflection of the English language as it is popularly used. This means that any changes or additions to our content are founded in careful research demonstrating that a word has been widely used over a long period of time. Since there is overwhelming evidence for the popular use of the spelling “hip-hop,” we are bound to report it as a valid spelling. We do not alter our content based on petitions or anything besides the usage evidence available to us. We also have no association with the American Psychological Association and are unable to directly communicate changes to them or request alterations to their style guide, so I'm afraid we're unable to accommodate your second request.

That said, I can see from a brief Internet search that the term is at least sometimes spelled “hip hop.” I will recommend to our editors that the spelling of this word be
further researched and, if supported by the evidence, that the non-hyphenated spelling be added to the entry.

We hope this information is helpful. Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

Merriam-Webster, Inc.
Dr. Ian Levy’s *Hip Hop and Spoken Word Therapy in School Counseling: Developing Culturally Responsive Approaches* (2021) starts with the author’s ode to Hip Hop, a personal narrative that creates a foundational groundwork for the book. Levy sets the tone for how Hip Hop, counseling, and spoken word therapy can combine to create a culturally responsive experience for students. Levy explains that Hip Hop Spoken Word Therapy (HHSWT), is a “holistic approach to school counseling” based on “five years of practice as a school counselor, as well as an additional three years as a counselor educator” (4). HHSWT brings together “elements of counseling and hip-hop education to detail the theoretical development, practical implementation and empirical evaluation” to school counseling (4).

In his text, he cites other foundational scholars to lay the groundwork for his theory and contribution to the field. His goals with this text were to talk about his time as a practitioner, lover of Hip Hop, and how to implement Hip Hop and spoken word therapy in a school setting, particularly within school counseling.

The layout of the text was beneficial and effective in building the reader’s knowledge. Levy took his time explaining Hip Hop culture and its history to claim its importance in education and counseling. By centering the voices and experiences of Brown and Black folks, Levy can dig deeper into Hip Hop’s contribution to his program as a school counselor. Levy does not shy away from talking about the perceptions of Hip Hop and some of its negative histories, instead, he provides a holistic look at the art form. He also made sure to talk in-depth about oppressive practices in education that impact the student’s experience. Levy’s book is divided into seven chapters that contain extensive and excellent references for each chapter. He maps out his programming and school counseling background in each chapter to make his claims and solidify his findings.

Touching on cultural competency and social justice in the first chapter provided background information that is needed to better understand Levy’s goals throughout the text (15). Levy is clear in his assertion that in order to truly do school counseling one must be culturally competent and be aware of the injustices that one’s students face. This is how a school counselor can effectively impact their student body. The notion and implications of the importance of care are made clear throughout the text. Levy states that “when working with Black and Brown youth, school counselors pull from their inherently educational and counseling identity to authentically understand youth’s lived
experiences, identities, and context to co-construct a path towards a holistic development” (17).

In chapter two, Levy maps out his pilot study for his HHSWT course. He explains his curriculum and its significance to “aid students in developing stress coping skills” (27). Using Hip Hop and spoken word as an outlet will address the possible emotional stress adolescents face in their communities and at school. Levy focused on emotional themes and group activities to facilitate his HHSWT course. He used quantitative data to identify and explore the changes in his student’s “emotional self-awareness, perceived stress and stress coping skill development” (31). After mapping out his pilot study, he talks about the importance of authenticity and the role of “realness” as a school counselor. Levy asserts that the authenticity in Hip Hop can translate to lessons and programs for school counseling. This level of authenticity makes Black and Brown students less leery of counseling professionals. Levy expresses how important it is to create genuine relationships with students, something that is at the core of a good school counselor. The counselor’s authenticity should not be mistaken for cultural appropriation, which Levy unpacks extensively in chapter three. The act of appropriation, as Levy explains, can be seen in the trendier aspects of combining Hip Hop and education. That is not the purpose or goal of his programming, and he discusses in length how to avoid appropriation of Hip Hop in educational settings. He calls this “cultural humility” (43), which is the effort to resist appropriation and work towards developing real relationships with students.

One of his most revealing chapters was chapter four, where Levy explains the importance of co-creating counseling spaces with youth. This activity allows students to have autonomy over how their space looks and feels, and what it represents for them. It makes it a safe space for them and a place they can take pride in. Levy gives real-life examples of how he raised funds to assist students with co-creating the counseling office. Students made that space into their own mock recording studio and were able to use that space to record some of their own music with the support of staff. This chapter stands out because it brings in a communal practice that instills a sense of care for students. Loyalty and family are two themes that show up constantly in Hip Hop culture and by creating a space with students, Hip Hop counseling praxis is at play in real-time.

Towards the end of the book, Levy discusses future goals for HHSWT. He is aware of some of the limitations of this monograph such as the small sample sizes in his studies, but I believe he can consult other counselors to bring HHSWT to their schools over time. I would love to see how Levy can incorporate some of Ruth Nicole Brown’s Hip Hop feminist pedagogy into future HHSWT programs. This text is a great starting point for all school counselors to learn how to create a more culturally responsive counseling program that embodies Hip Hop culture, spoken word, social justice, and authentic relationship building. Hip Hop can be a major influence in making pedagogy and therapy more relatable to young learners and can connect them to their educators and counselors.

KáLyn T. Coghill is a PhD candidate in the Media, Art, and Text program at Virginia Commonwealth University. Their research focuses on digital misogynoir on Twitter, Hip Hop,
Black Girlhood Studies, and Hip Hop Education. As an interdisciplinary scholar, Kay enjoys being able to lean into different disciplines to deepen their own research and to inform their projects. Kay is the cofacilitator and creator of the sister circle called GLOW, which creates space for Black girls and non-binary femmes at a local high school in Richmond Virginia. They incorporate Hip Hop Feminism, Hip Hop Education, and Hip Hop Counseling into the group lessons alongside their cofacilitator Christina Tillery.
Bios

KáLyn T. Coghill

Kay Coghill is a PhD candidate in the Media, Art, and Text program at Virginia Commonwealth University. Their research focuses on digital misogynoir on Twitter, Hip Hop, Black Girlhood Studies, and Hip Hop Education. As an interdisciplinary scholar, Kay enjoys being able to lean into different disciplines to deepen their own research and to inform their projects. Kay is the cofacilitator and creator of the sister circle called GLOW which creates space for Black girls and non-binary femmes at a local high school in Richmond Virginia. They incorporate Hip Hop Feminism, Hip Hop Education, and Hip Hop Counseling into the group lessons alongside their cofacilitator Christina Tillery.

Leah Tonnette Gaines

Dr. Leah Tonnette Gaines is a Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Central Florida. Her research interests are in the histories, cultures, and experiences of African Americans. This includes, but is not limited to, urban education, structural inequities, African American Language, beauty politics, and Hip Hop.
Frederick “Dr. G” Gooding, Jr

Frederick Gooding, Jr. (PhD, Georgetown University) is an Associate History Professor and the Dr. Ronald E. Moore Endowed Professor of the Humanities at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Featured in national publications such as The New York Times and USA Today, Dr. Gooding critically analyzes image within mainstream culture and engages audiences on racial patterns “hidden in plain sight.” “Dr. G,” as he is affectionately known, has also provided social commentary on CBS, NBC and Fox News networks and served as inaugural Chair of TCU’s Race & Reconciliation Initiative.

M. Nicole Horsley

I received a PhD in African American and African Diaspora Studies and Film and Media Studies from Indiana University, Bloomington. I hold a M.A. in Women’s Studies and M.Ed. from Claremont Graduate University. I graduated Summa Cum Laude from UCLA. My work focuses on the liberation of Black people globally with a particular interest in Black women ontologies, bodies, queerness, and sexual liberation. I am an Africana, Visual Culture, and Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies scholar who, from these fields, brings an intersectional and liberatory lens to Black women's bodies. I interrogate the discourses on Black women’s genitalia and the under-theorized explicitness of the “Black female throat” as sites of conferred pleasure that are impacted by racial abjection.
Dana Horton

Dr. Horton is an Assistant Professor of English at Mercy College. She received her PhD in English at Northeastern University and her BA in English and African American Studies at Temple University. Her areas of specialization include Black Feminist Theory, African American Literature, Hip Hop Studies, Black Atlantic Studies, Postcolonial Literature, Multiethnic Literature, Contemporary American Literature, Slave Narratives, and Visual Rhetoric.

Brittany L. Long

Brittany L. Long is a Senior Research Analyst in Washington, D.C. She earned her Master’s in Anthropology from Brandeis University and graduated as a McNair Scholar from the University of Missouri. Professionally, Long is a data nerd and corporate market researcher, communicating insights that drive action. Her independent research goes into detail about Hip Hop space and entrepreneurialism while expanding the academic analysis of the Hip Hop South.
Shayne McGregor

Shayne McGregor holds a PhD in African American Studies and English from Yale University. He currently works as a web developer and is an independent scholar of Hip Hop and internet history and culture and is particularly interested in their interrelationship.

Pyar Seth

Pyar Seth is a doctoral candidate in Anthropology and Political Science at Johns Hopkins University. He studies Black sociopolitical life and death, policing and medicalization, subject formation, and the epistemic organization of health, disease, and risk.
Lyfestile

lyfestile (lyfestie7) is a St. Louis, MO based Hip Hop artist, writer, speaker and event organizer. His writings have been published by XXL magazine, The Boycott Times, WarTime Deluxmag.com, RawRoots.com, and other print and digital outlets. He is one of the organizers of the St. Louis Underground Music Festival *(SLUMFEST), a yearly event in St. Louis that highlights Hip Hop music and culture.

Anwar Uhuru

Anwar Uhuru is an Assistant Professor of African American Studies at Wayne State University. Uhuru’s research interests include Black Existentialism, Africana Philosophy, Critical Race Theory, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Their forthcoming book, The Insurrectionist Case for Reparations: Race, Value and Ethics, will be published through SUNY Press.