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Rejecting the rejecters: The latent effect of policy on subculture

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REJECTING THE REJECTERS:

THE LATENT EFFECTS OF POLICY ON SUBCULTURE

By

Ethan Higgins

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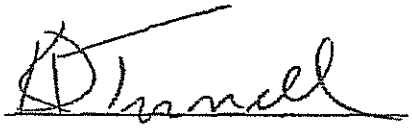

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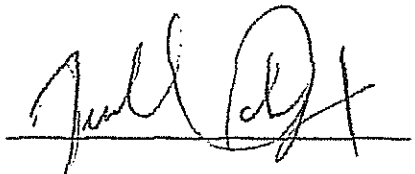

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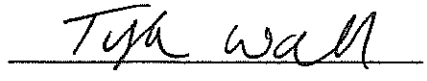

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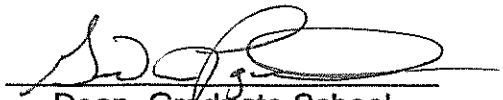

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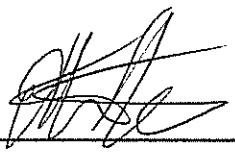
Signature 

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REJECTING THE REJECTERS:

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those I have lost along the way

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This thesis is a concluding effort of all the help, support and guidance I have received along the way. Without the people - mentors, writers and friends - this project would not have been possible. Without the interest in my work of those closest to me my motivation may have been stripped of its perseverance and resilience, as opposed to endowed with it. Their interests and personalities remained the driving force through much of the process - and perhaps without them knowing, our personal interactions and dynamics became the very life force of what I was attempting to illuminate.

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I wish to also recognize Eastern Kentucky University Libraries and, specifically, Nicole Montgomery. Nicole Montgomery was an integral part of the thesis process. Books and articles that I could never find, she came up with in short time. Without this efficiency and know-how this thesis would lack substance and important sources that helped to mold the eventual theoretical idea.

It is also necessary that I give thanks to the writers and main sources that my thesis utilizes. Jeffery O.G. Ogbar, Jeff Ferrell, Zygmunt Bauman, Tricia Rose

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Lastly, I would like to thank my family and close friends. The very basic fundamental concept of this thesis would have been impossible without their support and rejection, their questions and their answers, the agreements or the disagreements. Most personally and intimately, I would like to thank my fiancé, and soon-to-be wife, Elise. As the most integral piece of support she helped to infuse my ambiguity with resolve, and my anxieties with confidence. Perhaps most importantly, she never stopped listening to my rants or having new questions. Always asking to hear about it, endlessly; even though she had heard it for the thousandth time.

ABSTRACT

Specifically, this thesis is a look into rap lyrics, subculture, policy, reflexivity and the formation of the social self. In a broader vision, this thesis attempts to mold a theoretical pathway that illuminates where our cultural products "come from," not historically, but socially. Through the vehicle of rap lyrics I attempt to show that there is a historical and social structure that molds, limits and contains the very possibility of what music and lyrics can come to be. I try to show that the decisions we make on a national scale effects groups which have little political power, effectively recreating their realities, cultures and their value systems. Policy becomes a mechanism, which I call rejection, that forces people to live certain ways consequently reforming their social mapping, and by extension, their social selves. I then utilize auto-ethnography to show that, perhaps, rejection is a part of all us, and that it never quite escapes our cultural products, our work and those things we create.

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Chapter 1

Auto-Ethnographical Introduction

Fascination with black culture and its products is hardly a new phenomenon. Throughout the ages black cultural products have been the center of wonder, intrigue, criticism, revolt and intelligence, among other things (Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). Rap and hip-hop lyrics are renown for speaking to marginalized minorities who empathize with the weight of the represented conflicts and white audiences that feel the weight of their lyrical flows - signifying more than rhythmic beats and harsh, fiery words, but an essence of music that comes from a deep cultural progression (Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994).

It is easy to see that fascination with black cultural products predates the times of rap - from black jazz musicians, to the soulful R&B music, to the intensity of black rock n' roll artists, there has existed an engrossing quality about this music and the messages that exude from it, for all backgrounds and ethnicities.(Rose, 1994). Perhaps, the quality that creates the most intrigue, within rap and hip-hop, is the nature of its meaning and message. There seems to exist in much of rap and hip-hop a unique, but intrinsic oppositional quality, where MC's utilize their lyrical flows to possibly liberate the minds of marginalized populations, to mobilize the oppressed, and to refute the normalized claims of mainstream ideology and gentrification (Hebdige, 1987; Ogbar, 2007, Rose, 1994). In his book *Hip-Hop Revolution* Jeffery Ogbar (2007,

p.39) suggests that an oppositional quality is more than a by-product of the music, but is intrinsic to the nature of rap and hip-hop, by writing:

> From this vantage, the art pulled qualities from the pervasive sensibilities of black 'oppositional' culture that had become increasingly popular in the 1960's and hegemonic in black America in the early 1970's. In essence, oppositional culture is the system of beliefs and practices that operates counter to the dominant culture and ideologies. Oppositional culture was woven into the tapestry of hip-hop from its inception.

Music is a unique instance in human existence - a cultural product that is irrefutably arbitrary and subjective, yet at the same time, fails to divorce itself from the social, political or cultural trends of the times, and perhaps unwillingly or unknowingly, artists inscribe social cues that are particular to the historical and environmental surroundings (Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). As Jeffery Ogbar (2007, p.39), states: "Indeed, the contours, nuances, and personality of hip-hop music reflect the world that gives birth to the music."

This thesis examines why and how lyrics, specifically rap and hip-hop lyrics, are paramount as objects of study in the social sciences. In a criminological world of methodological discourse that pursues, with great adoration, quantitative and instantly pragmatic numbers, the qualitative examination of human conditions often exists as the forgotten landscape and is

condemned for a lack of purity. A field of study bereft of the things that elicit the feeling of being human greatly limits the capacity of understanding human life.

As will be shown in the Criticisms chapter of this thesis, mainstream society is in heavy disagreement with the "dissolute" essence of rap and hip-hop, often maintaining that the rap scene is the cause of the loss of morality, and a drift away from a life of proper American values (Bogazianos, 2012). Opposed to studying it as an important construct of culture, there are often proposed measures to limit the creative capacities through derogatory labeling, or to limit the possibility of sales through the music industry (Bogzianos, 2012; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994).

While the goal for the first half of this beginning was to highlight the issues, the goal for the remainder of this introduction is to describe the auto-ethnographic method of how I was led to this project. Perhaps as important as the content of this thesis, were those lines of thought and components of culture which helped me to arrive at its finality. Dimitri Bogazianos (2012) writes, at the end of his book, an excellent methodological essay that helped to enlighten my own methodology, to understand my own line of theoretical progression and continues to shine light on how to author this thesis. By introducing his own methods of writing his book, he helped liberate me of my constraints. Following his example, this introduction will work to include my own progression of thought and some anecdotes that directed me to my interest on this topic and my conclusion.

This auto-ethnographical way of constructing an introduction may be unorthodox, yet I believe the importance of this cannot be understated, especially for future writers. Reliving the thought process can provide a level of reflexivity for the author while simultaneously working to implement admonishments for other theorists and writers, demythologizing the intrepid certainty, and the unreachable authorship profile of being an accomplished writer. No person understands how daunting this can be than one who currently resides there.

For Bogazianos (2012, p.151), it was a single line of lyrical text that led him to his eventual conclusion. He said: "It started simply, with a ten-word phrase that would not go away: 'Somehow the rap game reminds me of the crack game.' In that lyric I saw a circuitry of meaning - connections between crime and culture, mainstreams and undergrounds, industries of crime and crimes of industry." This enlightened and revealing idea spawned a change in my thinking and my writing.

While I have difficulty pointing definitely to one lyric or one idea that defined my interest, I can instead point to many ideas that acted as catalysts in the eventual culmination of my theoretical construct. If I had to start in one place, it too would be with one innocuous lyric, which perpetuated my fascination with the origins and underlying meanings of rap and hip-hop music. For me, the lyric comes from Kanye West, in a song rapped by Kanye West and Jay-Z, called 'Run this Town" (Carter, 2009, track 4). Considering the popularity, notoriety and wealth of these artists - both of whom have developed large followings due to their lyrical works and they have become label executives with a combined net worth of over five hundred million dollars - I was originally skeptical of the intent

and the real meaning within the words of the song, which is why the relentless echo of this one lyric inside my head was confounding. The song itself is about the nature of rap, the battle for ownership and an artist controlling their own fate.

In fact, the song relays the consistent violence of corporations that create binding contracts, and the artists themselves who are exploited. The music industry itself offers tight-binding contractual agreements to those artists who "make it." Through legal precedents, corporations have the ability to maintain a protective sense of "personhood" where they are protected by the Fourteenth Amendment's right of due process, yet aggressively and recklessly pursue a mandate to increase the profit margins and wealth of the combining shareholders at all costs (Bogzianos, 2012). These contracts that trap artists represent a higher function of exploitation than artists may have been previously subjected to. The song "Run this town" (Carter, 2009, track 4) valorizes the unprecedented achievement acquired by the lyricists in the song. These artists have, at the top of their profession, taken the exploitation out of the equation for themselves, and we see that the lyrics, "only thing that's on my mind, is who's gonna run this town tonight," is a jab sent in the direction of the industry of music and the corporations who own artists' creative power.

However, in this song one line dominantly reveals itself to me: "What you think I rap for, to push a fuckin Rav-4?" Perhaps, Kanye West is pointing to and condemning the idea of rapping for fame, revealing a higher calling that leaks through his beats and his words; insisting that being able to influence the salability of luxury products such as the Rav-4 is, at best, of a secondary priority.

Perhaps, Kanye West is pointing to an insistence that music to him, is more than having the money to afford nice cars, but that the money and the luxury items are little more than a by-product of following his life purpose as successfully as he does; perpetuating oppositional messages and lyrics globally.

Insistently, I would contend that Kanye West insists in his complete control of his world, that he does inspired work to beat the necessity of fighting for scraps on the side of the table. He raps to find an avenue to completely own himself materialistically and symbolically. He wants success without constraints and without selling his soul to the wealthy, which is accomplished by being above mid-level vehicles and endorsing products in advertisements. Regardless of his intent in these lyrics, they caught me effectively and implored me to recreate them in my head - imagining in different ways what I did, in fact, think he rapped for.

Other lyrics and artists caused me to further invest myself in the need to understand the complexities of this social phenomenon. Shawn Mims is an American rapper who released his first album on March 27th, 2007. The album name did more than label his first release, but also worked to define Shawn Mims as a rapper. The title of the album, "Music is my savior," (Mims, 2007) is also the acronym for his rapper name, which is his last name. "Mims" then, is both his identity of his person as a last name, and the identity of his rapping persona and purpose. This understanding worked further, illuminating that for some, music is not simply about the fame and the fortune, but that identity itself is deeply intertwined within the essence of the creative power of rap and hip-hop. In a

world where it can be difficult for those without guidance to make it through, music can have an altogether different meaning and value.

Rap and Hip-hop lyrics were not the only genres that perpetuated a growing interest in the necessity of studying lyrics as a social phenomenon. Rock often tugged at my curiosity quite often, offering lyrics that gave great insight into the purpose and potency of the art of developing music. Frank Turner is a songwriter and singer that helped to pique my interest in the necessity to study lyrics. Turner is a British-born folk/ punk artist who released five albums between 2007 and 2013. On his 2011 album, "England Keep my Bones," Turner released a song called "I Still Believe" (Turner, 2011, track 3) in which he relays to us the power of music, namely 'rock n' roll' music. He attempts to create an understanding that music has the power to unite people, spread messages that lead to solutions of social problems and that he "still believes" in the common good that music can accomplish. He notes that in a modern age with globalized technology that music's power is more accessible than ever, by writing "now anybody could take this stage," and even though a person may have limited resources that in today's powerful technological age that they may, "make miracles from minimum wage." By implying that any person regardless of social class can "make miracles" he is pointing to the uniquely founded powers of modern technological products and that any person may create and promulgate an intrinsically oppositional message. In another stanza, he profoundly cites how music can perpetuate mobilization on social issues, by writing:

And I still believe in the sound,

> That has the power to raise a temple and tear it
> down. And I still believe in the need,
> For guitars and drums and desperate poetry.
> (Turner, 2011, track 3)

Another band that can be classified in the rock distinction uses a line of writing that led me to my eventual conclusion. Rise Against is a punk/rock band that delves into polemical issues within their songs, often accusatorially towards government and other institutions of power. They often write songs condemning the War on Terror, and those powerful officials who make decisions to go to war. However, Rise Against often tackles other social issues as well. The band is regularly involved in progressive events, and maintained their roles as strong critics of George W. Bush (Pascarella, 2008). While involved in a "Rock Against Bush, Vol.1" compilation album around the time Barack Obama was elected in 2008, they were cited as saying, "Few things are as exciting as watching Bush finally release America as his eight year hostage" (Ableson).

While Rise Against is often directly and explicitly political, they can also reveal insights into the importance of social events and scripts being predicated on something more. In their song, "Survive" (2006, track 13), Rise Against takes the perspective that social events outside an individual's control can often have a great and lasting effect on who they become as people. They write that often times, a person's social identity is forged in the stresses of negative cultural and social events that surround them throughout their lives.

> Life for you, (who we are) has been less than
> kind
> So take a number, (who we are) stand in line
> We've all been sorry, (who we are) we've all
> been hurt
> But how we survive, (who we are) is what
> makes us who we are.
> (Rise Against, 2006, track 13)

The last line of the stanza stood out from the rest, "But how we survive, is what makes us who we are." This reveals profound implications that the battles and depressions, the great moments and moments of loss, that exist outside of our control, often work to create an identity of self within us. The idea that we carry those things that oppress us with us always lends great insight into how music can be more than just mundane lines of text, but rather, that music consists of a world of revealing insights that exposes the effects of life on people.

Here, at this point, lyrics were of a great interest to me, and the social, cultural and political meanings they encompassed seemed to be revealing more substance than mainstream narratives purported. Figuring out, however, how to go about connecting lyrics to a deeper meaning that not only defined the purpose of the lyrics, but the origin of the black cultural products of rap within the subculture, was in itself, far off. This was an endeavor that would be entirely impossible without the likes of Jeff Ferrell and his book, *Crimes of Style*. In his book, Ferrell (1996) writes of completing a study of a subculture of graffiti artists

and by engaging in their content and their culture throughout this study, he was able to better become attuned to the complexities, the feeling, and emotionality of such a lifestyle.

However, it was the ending chapters of Jeff Ferrell's book that, for my purposes, contained the most profound material. Utilizing public critiques, Ferrell (1996, p.116) reveals a mainstream ideology of public shared disdain for the misunderstood cultural practice of graffiti art. He maintains that moral crusades against misconstrued social practices create unfair moral attacks on things we fail to fully understand. Equating public outrage with the social practice of graffiti art represented a moral panic of a newly founded "dissolute" and misguided group that threatened the traditional morals and values increasingly with every painted sign or redecorated wall. Through Ferrell's writing we can see, out of erroneous fear and misunderstanding, that society can denounce the lifestyles and purposes of groups of people with little regard for the potential trails of unintended negative consequences that rejection can have for those subcultures. This insight was invaluable in the construction of my own personal theoretical progression towards offering a deeper understanding of rap and hip-hop.

My theoretical progression was not capable of being completed until I read through Zymunt Bauman's book, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. In this writing Bauman (1998) explores the real meanings and the real consequences of globalizing society, but most importantly for my intents, the ending chapters address different effects that globalization has had on different social classes and their members; he argues that globalization often means

mobilization for the rich and localization for the poor. In his analysis he visits the concept of the social production of crime, and the devastating consequences this process has on lower and working classes.

Bauman (1998) notes in his last chapter concerning global law and order, that the social production of crime works to strike at the bottom of the social ladder. Further, that the daily tasks, procedures and rituals coveted by the bottom of the social structure are those that are most likely to be inscribed into the concept of criminality and that this, in effect, creates a systematic cycle that constantly works to keep the downtrodden down, and to reject fields of difference. Compared to those at the top, who usually commit criminality through corporations, the poor are easier to condemn. Crimes of the rich rarely manifest themselves in a physical capacity, often having "no body" at all. For those caught in the system, in efforts to emancipate themselves, they must enter into some form of rejection.

Lastly, the book *5 Grams: Crack Cocaine, Rap Music and the War on Drugs* was very possibly the most defining book that I read while constructing this thesis - helping very much to mold the pathway of theory and possessing one of the most astute understandings of the complexities of rap culture. It also provided conclusions that added to the final layer of depth to what I was attempting to construct. Effectively, Bogazianos (2012) portends that rap culture evolved out of more than conscious opposition to mainstream ideology, and that the cultural and oppositional products that are extended, are done so through a response to the effects of unintended consequences of governmental and institutional policy.

In order to achieve this sentiment, Bogazianos (2012) uses a comparative analysis that relates the "crack game" to the "rap game," correlating the violence, the oppression and the effects on the subcultures in both instances. His point is that rap lyrics may be evidence of more than random, mundane cultural products of conscious response, but instead that the meanings of lyrics themselves may, in fact, be much more structural than ever previously conceived. That the meanings within lyrics may very well have subconscious qualities, and as Brett Dennen in the song "Ain't no reason (2006, track 1)*,"* conveys this idea, "slavery is stitched into the fabric of my clothes"; that social phenomena forced upon people, may in fact, stitch its effects deep into the fabric of our social identities and, by extension, into our lyrical souls.

The purpose of this thesis is to uncover a more encompassing understanding of rap lyrics. Commonly, mainstream ideology works to reject the difference of misunderstood social practices. Academics regularly position the ins-and-outs of rap culture on an argument of authenticity. The limitations of both of these assertions is palpable. It is uncommon to affirm that the study of lyrics has great value, as they have no directly physical utilities, as they are associated with no easily understood numbers or scales, and as they seemingly have little concrete connection to the "real" world. However, as Bogazianos (2012, p.10) reminds us:

> [Rap is].. a transformation and innovation
> which composed a generation out of what
> seemed separate work and experience

bringing in new feelings, people, relationships;
rhythms newly known, discovered, articulated;
defining the society rather than merely
reflecting it.

Assuming that qualitatively studying something as allegedly mundane as lyrical flows is futile in the face of quantifiable numbers fails to look at the defining characteristics of society. It is a necessity that when dealing in a human environment, with human subjects that the complex nature of cultural products be considered, as the exigencies of human life often transcends the explanatory powers of quantifiable statistics. The limitations, the scope and the efficiency of numbers is an often insufficient lens through which to study people; numbers fall short in examining and recreating the nuanced ailments and evils of society, the pains and the sacrifices, the losses and the sadnesses, that can be unleashed and sustained in the mercurial vicissitudes of human existence. Lastly, that the unintended consequences of these calamities and planned travesties have effects that extend beyond what anyone can see.

Chapter Outline and Synopsis

In chapter one of this thesis I engage in an auto-ethnographic introduction. Although unorthodox, I undertook this method with an underlying belief that how we question can often be as important as how we answer. It leads authors working through critical issues to more proficient writing in practice and more

advanced theorizing towards those issues. I believed that laying out an understanding of how I came to and worked through the theoretical progression was important to my writing in a reflexive manner and could offer help to readers in order to better grasp the basis of the concept that this thesis constructs.

In this light, I chose to use the introduction to go through the literature, music and other components that aided in my eventual arrival at a theoretical construct that explained what is inside the creation of lyrics. It is a play-by-play understanding of the origins of the project and the process I went through, eventually resulting in the culminating idea.

In chapter two, I describe the methodology utilized in this thesis and provide some background on the history of those methods. In this introduction and the conclusion I utilize auto-ethnography method, which shows the reader the reflection of the writing process on myself and the reflections of the conceptual material in correlation with my own being.

Further, while there is not a section devoted to lyrical analysis this thesis does involve some attempts of it. Understanding how lyrics are made and where the traits and characteristics of those lyrics come from is an important main goal of this thesis. In this sense, it is imperative to show a background and provide an underlying understanding of the method of lyrical analysis.

In chapter three, "Public Outcry," the main goal is to provide an understanding of the general perspective of mainstream ideology. This is accomplished by first providing evidence of public figures that denounce rap and hip-hop and then developing a construct that links the acceptance of rap and hip-

hop music to a moral panic. Showing that the media and mainstream population utilizes two main mechanisms to propagate this image, we can successfully create a linkage between these musical cultural products and unwarranted, circulating disdain.

In order to show the way moral entrepreneurs create and embed rhetoric within ideology and discourse I utilize two concepts from other authors including a machinery of language and ideology and an outraged citizenry. These mechanisms erect a discourse of difference and fear which is constructed around rap culture. Afterwards an image of an outraged "responsible" society is promulgated and panic is developed around the image and the lyrics of rap.

In this chapter I also provide a background of the explanation of rap and hip-hop lyrics that is most commonly offered by academics and scholars in the field. This explanation, called "Authenticity," describes rap music as an attempt to appeal to ones original roots to prove to others their "realness." Authenticity has been extended by some scholars to represent an economic authenticity where maintaining the distinct black pathos of the gangsta rapper profile has become profitable. This extension helps to explain that rap, as a social practice, has become intertwined with the neoliberal idea of capital. Scholars often describe authenticity as a way to entertain white youth who have the money to purchase their music. Maintaining a comical profile of the gangsta rapper who acts with abandon is described as being a high sell point for white American youth, correlating a rapper's identity to being an actor and sustaining a character.

In chapter four I describe a theoretical construct highlighting why studying culture and the cultural products it elicits is important. Using a concept from Bogazianos (2012), which I call "cyclical meaning," I describe that powerful societal and political events that manifest themselves as policy initiatives fracture society. Destructive policy creates new ways of life and existence for groups of people forming new identities - and over years and eventually decades - leaks, through *historicity,* into the discourse, values and ways of thinking. This meaning, which has seeped from the past decades of destructive government violence, exists infused into the the very words of the culture and the lyrical flows of music.

I move on to say that, and it is in this sense, that "all rap matters," that all rap and hip-hop most literally sprout from something and is indicative of a much grander structure. Whether rappers and hip-hop artists are speaking of 'bling' or 'nice cars,' or are political activists, their words come stained from decades of structural violence labeled as 'policy.' A history of criminalizing difference and poverty have created fractured pieces of society that feel the weight of built up structural rejection, and who return the favor with their own rejection.

In the last section I focus on policy. As much as this thesis is about rap and lyrical flows, it is also about policy, as the way policy becomes conceived and supported is an important process to understand. I implore the need for a greater understanding of criminality and criminal justice processes in the general public. Further, I take the concepts of "frames of society," from Judith Butler (2010), and from Bogazianos (2012) the "common-sense criminologist" to examine and question the public's support to implement policies that have

detrimental long-lasting latent effects. Considering that misinformed policy may have severe effects that are financially and socially costly, it is a wonder there are so many "dinner-table" experts on the critical issues of criminal justice, who have the ability to dismiss criminal justice theory for common-sense attitudes "regardless of what experts have to say about it all" (Bogazianos, 2012, p.9).

The fifth and final chapter of this book is the conclusion, which staying consistent with the essence of the introduction, attempts to maintain a reflexive and auto-ethnographical tone. This chapter uses statistics to represent and highlight the obvious problems that past policies have created and shows that the saliency of the discourse that allowed it to happen is still alive and strong. Further, this chapter goes into the reflexivity of asking questions. By demonstrating that different questions through a lens of reflexivity led me to different answers, I am hoping to challenge the public and government officials to similarly look reflexively and question their own beliefs reflectively. New questions demand new answers, and with them new understandings of complex social and cultural phenomenon.

Chapter 2

Method as Qualitative Data

Auto-ethnography

Auto-ethnography is not considered a conventional scientific method as "traditional views" see auto-ethnography "as a contaminant" (Wall, 2006, p.147). Conventional approaches maintain that a researcher should remove the bias and subjectivity from the substance of the work in order to contrive a final product that is purely scientific. Regardless, auto-ethnography is making ground and beginning to establish itself with many researchers who do not agree that positivism is the true measure of social science. Sparkes' (2000, p.21) account of auto-ethnography is that they are "highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding." Pelias (2003, p. 372) maintains that auto-ethnography is useful in that it "let's you use yourself to get to culture." Similar to my own experience of research, others are finding that "showing stories of experience" has the potential "to contribute to our understanding of the social world" (Wall, 2006, 147).

Inspired quite heavily by Bogazianos' (2012) "Methodological Essay," my own experience led to instituting auto-ethnography as a main method of this thesis. The auto-ethnographic sections of this writing find themselves outside the body of the thesis and limited to the introduction and conclusion. Inspired by the

reflexivity used by Bogazianos' (2012), as he was able to lay out his qualitative method and recall his writing and learning process, I was influenced to do the same.

I utilized auto-ethnography in the introduction of this thesis in order to demonstrate the process by which lyrics, literature and concepts eventually came to mold the pathway of my theoretical development. By retrospectively tracing back the process of constructing and writing I hoped to accomplish a couple goals. First, in the spirit of providing a solid base of knowledge to the reader it became important to show the process and all the components that were fashioned together to depict the final idea. Second, in some sense Bogazianos' (2012) deconstructed and re-conceptualized what it means to author a social science work. By writing outside the normal guidelines of social science literature he revealed and liberated the creative freedoms of being a writer that organizational and institutional rules so regularly tend to strangle; and if one statement comes out of the very method and format of this thesis it should be that so often official rules for writing and official methods of study work to remove human qualities that the social sciences, of all sciences, should retain. So often, the simplicity of institutional rules suffocates the complexity of the human writing and learning experience.

Other evidence of auto-ethnography is found in the conclusion of this thesis. The conclusion is designed to pick up where the introduction left off and while the point of the introduction was to note the pieces which were being sewn together, the point of the conclusion was to reflexively understand the whole. The

main goal of using the auto-ethnographic method in the concluding section was to highlight the underlying introspective connections which led me to the topic of this writing. The correlating point was that reflexively looking back at my own processes influenced my academic conscious to raise questions about what was possible to study and what new answers were made available to topics already studied. Reflexivity, through auto-ethnography, became the main methodological mechanism used in this thesis.

Lyrical Analysis

This thesis does not claim to be purely a lyrical analysis of the rap and hip-hop genres, and while there is not a section dedicated to pure lyrical analysis there are some attempts of it throughout the body of the writing. My goal is not to decipher the lyrics into exact interpretations but to discover why studying lyrics is important by understanding where they "come from" and their social construction. Lyrical analysis can offer insight in this way by revealing the different structures of music and their alternative discourses, and by providing insight into those processes and ways of life which gauge and formulate the first two. Hopefully there is some consensus on the lyrical meanings, but either way, the purpose of lyrical analysis in this work is not to necessarily extract the true meaning accurately. Most commonly, the presented lyrics within this thesis are utilized to mold a pathway to a conclusion by often exemplifying a correlating point.

Unfortunately, the outlook for lyrical analysis is bleak as it is rarely accepted as an appropriate methodology. It is necessary for all of us to fully

understand and concede the arbitrary nature of lyrics and that there seems to be, in all lyrics, a ranging element of relativity and subjectivity that is never quite absent. This conceded element is often what omits lyrical analysis from consideration as a serious method of science and study, and instead, relegates it to conjecture. However, this understanding succeeds in dismissing a method of study that is, indeed and most literally, teeming with life.

My intention for utilizing the method of lyrical analysis comes from an idea that the lyrics we compose are only possible in the essence of our social and cultural existence. Formulated discourse is dependent on social, historical, spatial and temporal conditions and different existences for different people and places will spawn alternative concepts of music, lyrics and art. Thus, the conditions and experiences of human life are often leaked into cultural discourse and into the construct of lyrical flows. The infused history within discourse and the cultural representation of human experience are intertwined into meaningful cultural products. This combined product shows what it is that makes the subjective experience so valuable as a method of analysis and a unit of qualitative data.

Chapter 3

Criticisms

...as I look at that behavior in those lower animals and I look at the people who go around in our cities with paint cans and other things marking territory, it causes me to wonder perhaps if they're not operating at a, at a level in the, [sic] in the animal chain not too far removed from that that we observe in lower animals.

- Denver Deputy Mayor and Manager of Public Works Bill Roberts (1990 Metro Wide Graffiti Summit)

Public Outcry

An attempt of ethnographic inquiry into lyrics and their origins is not a common practice, and the acceptance of this thought process is rare in the populations of gentrified America. Typically, rap and hip-hop cultures are examined as evidence that depicts the plummet of nation-wide ethical awareness (Bogazianos, 2011; Ferrell, 1996; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). Further, this culture

is looked through the lens of middle class America as predators feasting on the youth of the nation, condemning their minds to the valorization of blunt and visceral language, extreme scenes of lethal and non-lethal violence, and endlessly pulling them to a irreparable path of moral corruptness (Bogazianos, 2011). It is often this argument against rap and hip-hop that spurs a disregard for rap culture itself, and an excoriation of the cultural products rap artists produce.

This view is heavily representative of the majority, with numerous officials and highly revered public figures making similar arguments that rap culture represents an inclination to recreate the world bereft of traditional morals. This encompasses the underlying premise of the argument that finds itself at the center of the conflict of difference, that the "worlds created by the young are at odds with adult morality" and that instead, "'we' have the right moral code, and that it is always in danger of being lost" (Bogazianos, 2011, p. 81).

Perhaps the most well-known attempt to attack black and rap culture comes from actor and comedian Bill Cosby. At the 2004 NAACP gala Cosby presented a structured speech that relentlessly attacked black Americans on a basis of personal responsibility by citing that no one can be blamed but themselves for vast social issues, such as a loss of morality and traditional values, that have led to many of the profound institutionalized societal ailments present today. He continued to say that these corrupted values have led to increased crime rates, increased teen pregnancies, and repeatedly and mainly scolds them for large high school dropout rates. Cosby heavily attacks parents of

today citing a clear misguidance in parenting values, intelligence and ability saying:

> Ladies and gentlemen, the lower economic and lower middle economic people are not holding their end in this deal. In the neighborhood that most of us grew up in, parenting is not going on. In the old days, you couldn't hooky school because every drawn shade was an eye. And before your mother got off the bus and to the house, she knew exactly where you had gone, who had gone into the house, and where you got on whatever you had one and where you got it from. Parents don't know that today. (2004, p.2)

He continued on to most famously show a clear misunderstanding of the continuing circumstances on the streets of urban cityscapes:

> Looking at the incarcerated, these are not political criminals. These are people going around stealing Coca Cola. People getting shot in the back of the head over a piece of pound cake! Then we all run out and are outraged: "The cops shouldn't have shot him." What the hell was he doing with the pound cake in his hand? I wanted a piece of pound cake just as bad as anybody else. And I looked at it and I had no money. And something called parenting said if you get

> caught with it you're going to embarrass your mother. (2004, p.2)

Cosby (2004) opines outright attacks that are constituted of personal responsibility and bad parenting. He draws from deep and complex social issues and then confines them to simplistic solutions. By erroneously reducing these complicated social issues he diminishes the importance of understanding deep-seated conditions that require complex thought and dismisses intricate understandings of the underlying structure of culture. Attributing these many social ills to a few basic attacks, based on a "good-old days" syndrome, Cosby (2004) diminishes them to individual and discretionary acts, such as bad parenting, of whose absence attempts to prove that today's citizens are just not made like they used to be.

To think that Cosby (2004) is alone in these attacks is a mistake, and hardly the only person to base deep social issues on basic principles of personal responsibility. Similarly to Cosby, in May 1996, a speech by presidential candidate Bob Dole heavily insisted that rap could be correlated with evil, and that the record companies that sold and distributed rap music were the "marketing of evil through commerce" (Dole, 1995). Further attacking the ostensible dissolute characteristics of rap he went on to direct his attacks on the companies that produce their material condemning them for "extolling from pleasures of raping, torturing, and mutilating women, from songs about killing policemen and rejecting law" (Dole, 1995). In this sense, declaring the dissolute

characteristics of rap was an attempt to garner votes as he was on the campaign trail. However, the fact that Dole believed excoriating rap would help attain votes, is in itself, revealing on the mainstream beliefs towards rap and rap culture.

Another presidential candidate to attack black culture was Bill Clinton during his presidential campaign. While giving a speech to Jesse Jackson Sr.'s Rainbow Coalition, Clinton attacked rapper Sister Souljah for a statement in a previously made music video: "If there are any good white people, I haven't met them." He responded by stating: "If you took the words 'white' and 'black,' and you reversed them, you might think David Duke was giving the speech" (Clinton & Smith, 1996). Jesse Jackson himself disagreed with Clintons' words and publicly excoriated him remarking that, "Sister Souljah represents the feelings and hopes of a whole generation of people" (Clinton & Smith, 1996). Unfortunately for then-presidential candidate Clinton, Sister Souljah was a well-written author and activist who, in response, wrote a scathing indictment of Clinton as a, "draft dodger, pot-smoker, racially insensitive, womanizer" (Cook, 2012).

Very similar to the arguments that previous presidential candidates made, were the words of the President of the National Association of the Chiefs of Police, Dennis Martin. His essay "The Music of Murder," which he wrote in ACJS Today (1993, p.160), consists of a complaint of rap music labeling it as nothing but an excuse of "self-gratification and self-expression [which] excuse aggressively violent and sexual behavior inflicted on others." Later in the piece, Martin (1993) relates rap to the rebellious nature of Elvis Presley, saying, "Put his

rebellion, swagger, and sexuality into the pressurized cauldron of a black ghetto and the resulting music explodes in rage" (p.160). It is difficult to reduce cultural productions of a complex cultural and historical experience much more drastically than the beginning of Martin's article, but he continues on to further diminish the complexities of rap music: "It is primitive music - stripped of melodic line and original chord progressions. The beat along propels the street smart rhyming verse lyrics through topics of deprivation, rebellion, poverty, sex, guns, drug abuse, and AIDS" (p.161).

The basic tenet of Martin's paper was to maintain that lyrics stimulate poor youth to commit violence towards police officers by promoting "cop-killer" themes. He included that the blunt, vulgar lyrics and harsh, "primitive" beats incite violence in those listeners and fans of rap music. Martin is attempting to present rap music as a problem that plagues society, a source of great violence, a distortion of reality and a corruption of values.

In ACJS Today, Jeff Ferrell and Mark Hamm (1994) construct an excellent response to Martin's attack on rap music. They work to refute the criticism of the relationship between listening to "cop-killer" themes and being incited to commit acts of violence. They remark that associating an example here and there fails to promote a "causal equation," but more likely represents a "statistical accident" (p.29). They go on to say that: "Treating this relationship as one of cause and effect therefore not only misrepresents the issues; it intentionally engineers self-serving moral panic around rap music, and obstructs solutions to the sorts of problems which rap portrays" (p.29).

High level officials are hardly the only critics to lay the brunt and miring faults of society-wide issues at the feet of rap music. In fact, blaming the cultural productions of black American subculture has become a common mainstream phenomenon and is regularly represented through middle class journalists and television anchors. Considering that most people who have the privilege to convey their perspective in the mainstream media sit at the middle class level or higher, lower and working class people have very little opportunity to defend themselves from the fusillade of attacks and the barrage of blame.

Some writers have the chance to criticize the products of a subculture because they write for a living and it is an intriguing subject, yet others use their position of authority to specifically criticize people who cannot defend themselves. Robert H. Bork was a conservative political activist, commentator and a former Supreme Court nominee (Ogbar, 2007). Bork, an avid critic of modern liberalism, attributed the status of moral declension to the "degenerate" music of rap (Bork, 1996). He tried to explain that rap is a "debased" form of music, which is "fundamentally hostile to American freedom" (Bork, 1996). He looks at rap as a product of modern liberalism where America has lost its social and legal discipline by allowing people, under the guise of "individualism," to get away with too much. He exclaims that rap is little more than, "noise with a beat" and a "knuckle-dragging sub-pidgin of grunts and snarls, capable of fully expressing only the more pointless forms of violence and the more brutal forms of sex" (Bork, 1996, p.124).

Similarly, Delores Tucker was an African American politician and civil rights activist who carried a great disdain for rap and hip-hop music, specifically gangsta rap (Curry, 2007; Ogbar, 2007). Regularly denouncing rap artists and their lyrics Tucker said:

> The rap talks about the life in the ghetto and makes it sound so good and so real. It puts people in the position of the gangster. Everyone accepts it and puts themselves in the video because of the misconception that is the only way to be somebody (Curry, 2007; Ogbar, 2007, p.119; Tucker, 1995).

Tucker denounced lyrics not only for their misogynistic lyrical flows, but also for their social effect on youth.

> [Children] are walking time bombs and gangsta rap is the origin of those time bombs. They are recruiting more and more young children. The cost to the community is just too great (Ogbar, 2007, p.119).

Tucker was an adamant and regular cultural critic who focused on rap and hip-hop artists and this attack warranted attention from those artists. Many rappers disliked Tucker and expressed their opposition to her political attacks through lyrics. Tupac Shakur was one of those artists who targeted Tucker in a song.

> Delores Tucker you's a mother fucker, Instead of trying to help a nigga you destroy your brother. (Shakur, 1996, track 18).

Tucker was also targeted by other famous rap artists including Eminem and KRS-One, who attacked her, similarly to Tupac Shakur, as a political activist and a traitor.

One of the most intense cultural critics of black American rap and hip-hop music is John McWhorter, an American linguist and political commentator. He has authored numerous books blaming individual black Americans for creating and following rap music. He provides, in his criticisms, deep-seated misunderstandings of the construction of rap and hip-hop lyrics.

> Many writers and thinkers see a kind of informed political engagement, even a revolutionary potential, in rap and hip-hop. They couldn't be more wrong. By reinforcing the stereotypes that long hindered blacks, and by teaching young blacks that a thuggish adversarial stance is the properly "authentic" response to a presumptively racist society, rap retards black success.
>
> (Mcwhorter, 2003)

McWhorter imposes the belief that rap creation and following comes of a character flaw influencing black American youth to be "thuggish" and standoffish. Rap music creates negative values which unnecessarily depart from traditional American values and manifests themselves in cultural conflict where rap listeners are the culprits and the aggressors.

McWhorter goes on:

> The rise of nihilistic rap has mirrored the breakdown of community norms among inner-city youth over the last couple of decades. It was just as gangsta rap hit its stride that neighborhood elders began really to notice that they'd lost control of young black men, who were frequently drifting into lives of gang violence and drug dealing. (2003)

Yet another cultural critic assuming that the declension of morality and value goes hand-in-hand with the creation of rap and hip-hop music. He claims that rap has created a "breakdown of community norms," and that America has "lost control of its young black men" without providing a context to understand norms and values.

Yet, despite all this clamoring to decry the individual actions of black American youth and despite the circulating mantra that black American cultural products have promoted insalubrious environments for the welfare of the common good, evidence suggests the exact opposite.

> In fact, if one look at life expectancy, income, educational attainment, poverty rates, teenage birthrate and infant mortality rates, the hip-hop generation is the most affluent generation of black people in U.S. history... Despite the declarations from critics that insist hip-hop has dumbed down black

> youth with "anti-intellectualism" and fear of being called white, African Americans in the hip-hop generation are the most educated generation of black people in U.S. history (Ogbar, 2007, p.128).

Despite the cries of presidential candidates, cultural critics and even famous comedians there is no statistical or factual information supporting the idea that rap and hip-hop music aid in the deterioration of American society. Further, despite the fact that statistical information consistently supports the existence of institutionalized racism, black Americans have steadily improved on nearly every arena of their societal lives through the explosion of rap and hip-hop.

This chapter only provides several examples of the outcry framing rap music as a moral detriment to society, and of course, potential examples of this are nearly endless. Amazingly, despite statistical information that outright opposes many of the common claims about rap music, factual information fails to stop or lessen the attack of these cultural products. Years of media attacks continue to create a demonized image of black American culture and youth. It is necessary to wonder if there are not ulterior self-interested agendas that are being pursued by those critics who continue to attack black American practices with no basis of factual information.

Authenticity Argument

To this point we have seen reactions to subculture from those who control and perpetuate mainstream ideology, value, thought and perceptions. What we have yet to evaluate is the common strains of explanation from academics who attempt to provide a point of understanding within lyrical flows. This section will maintain its focus on highlighting the most common debate among academics in the successful description of a deeper, perpetuating description of what is inside or underneath lyrics. Most likely, there are numerous attempts to underscore an underlying force that helps to create cultural productions, however this section will concentrate on one of the most commonly elicited arguments which helps to understand the construction and direction of the music.

The authenticity argument is utilized by many different academics and scholars to present and understand the environment of current musical scenes. Existing as an idea that points back to those characteristics that come to define working class and ostracized black Americans, it notes the inclination to stay true to those original traits. The argument maintains that this provides marginalized black Americans with a source of cultural identity to achieve, which helps differentiate them from white mainstream ideology and values. Ogbar (2007, p.39) elicits the basic argument of authenticity: "At its most fundamental level, 'realness' in hip-hop implies an intimate familiarity with the urban, working class landscape that gave rise to hip-hop in the 1970's."

Heavy underlying considerations of "keeping it real" become a forefront concept in much of rap's lyrical messages, often providing harsh examples of black American acts and events. Evidence of realness becomes a normal procedure of proving the value of one's worth and the transcendence of one's rapping ability. It further becomes a way to create ranking hierarchies between rappers, bifurcating rappers who "keep it real" from those who do not, implying levels of skill and originality. Further, proving one's authenticity and "realness" shows a black American culture that refuses to be gentrified, and which has the power to define what the deciding characteristics of their products are and to draw a line that weeds out those who do not fulfill the requirements. It is in this sense that proving authenticity becomes about proving where one comes from and proving that one has the imprints and scars that come from being a black citizen in America.

Ogbar (2007) goes much deeper into the economic argument to formulate a theory of economic authenticity, where rap culture is perpetuated through sell-out notions. Arguing that rap music became a recognized avenue of economic success - a way to even the playing field - black Americans began to recognize that embodying the "gangsta rap" image was lucrative. Existing as a business venture, Ogbar (2007, p.45) points to the fact that many famous and wealthy rappers did not come from the impoverished and marginalized situations that their music depicts, but instead often came from middle-class existences:

> For example, early MC's generally rapped about
> having huge amounts of cash, women and fame. Few

> complained that these early rappers more often than not lived with their parents, owned no cars, and lived in areas with a median poverty-level income.

Ogbar (2007) shows that although rap artists often based music on the idea of being an impoverished black American that the music itself was not always based on real life instances. This points to an understanding that black Americans could perpetuate a poor black American gangsta rapper profile as a lucrative business venture. Hence, selling out a particular image shows that the black American could most literally assume the role of acting a thug-like profile as a character in an avenue of economic advancement.

This idea of a way to use rap as an economic tool for black American advancement, resulted in the commodification of the rap scene. While some looked to rap to provide a forum for an unheard group's discontent, others saw the potential of selling everyday items, building musical empires, and acquiring large amounts of capital:

> Rap was often conceived of primarily as an 'authentic' development of African American cultural expression that had potential for black political voice, but was also under threat from various forces of commodification that appeared to be enlisting its stylistic innovations for such mundane things as selling cereal (Bogazianos, 2012, p.58).

Taking advantage of selling a black profile provided opportunities to acquire capital that many did not have previously. As a mechanism of economic advancement, black Americans realized they could sell their cultural difference and the essence of the "black pathos" (Ogbar, 2007, p.28). The representations of qualities of being a black American that mainstream American culture so readily laughs at could be packaged and sold back to those same mainstream Americans for consumption. However, achieving commodified blackness to make money rested on an ability to sell myopic representations of black Americans. Selling-out required legitimizing negative images of blackness causing a perpetuation of negative terms and providing uncivilized images of black society to the white community. Ogbar (2007, p.30) shows this in some detail:

> What does it mean that the Ying Yang twins are multiplatinum when the roots have barely gone gold? More important, the oversexed, violent, and misogynist tales that are passed off as ghetto realness have become an established marker for credibility, as well as radicalized authenticity that conflates poverty, crime, misogyny, and all things 'ghetto' with blackness. The ghetto itself becomes a spatial metaphor for black people, particularly ignorant and crude ones.

Ogbar's (2007) extended economic-based authenticity argument is premised on the idea of commercial salability. He maintains his idea on the fact that white

Americans make up the majority of music sales for black American rappers, and that in order to acquire more fame black rappers must adhere to the comic relief and myopic representations of being a thug or gangsta rapper as the epitome of the pitied black American character. Showing that most music sales go to white middle class households, implies that black American rappers are often not speaking to a largely African American crowd. It suggests that black American profiles and black American suffering has become a commodified product that can be successfully packaged into compact discs.

It has been seen thus far that images of authenticity are important to maintain an internal and mental connection to ones roots, and that authenticity may be a useful mechanism of economic advancement. While authenticity is a fascinating argument that certainly has a place within the explanation of black Americans' cultural products this theory clearly has some faults. Ogbar (2007) states that: "Most hip hop consumers have made their preferences for 'real niggas' clear. And it appears that the underground scene reflects the basic demographics of the commercial one: it is mostly white" (p.34).

While, undoubtedly it is accurate that middle class white Americans consist of the majority of consumers, such as file sharing; it is likely that black Americans acquire the cultural products through other means. Rose (1994, p.7) offers an excellent insight to why white Americans dominating the majority of rap music sales fails to concretely mean that black Americans are not listening:

> It is quite possible, however, that the percentage of white rap consumers in relation to overall sales is

> being disproportionately represented, because bootleg street sales couple with limited chain music store outlets in poor communities makes it very difficult to assess the demographics for actual sales of rap music to urban black and Hispanic consumers... In addition to inconsistent sales figures, black teen rap consumers may also have higher 'pass along' rate,' that is, the rate at which one purchased product is shared among consumers.

Rose (1994) provides in one paragraph relief to the idea that black American rappers are providing for a white audience, and that, in fact, black rappers are still very much speaking to a black American audience. This clearly shows that while black rappers may rely on white middle class Americans for a large portion of capital sustenance, that speaking to a black audience is still very much part of the process and the essence of those lyrical flows.

Perhaps, even more confusingly, in his book Ogbar (2007, p.69) admits that economic authenticity does not explain black American rap music. He admits that while economic authenticity is most likely a cog in the machine of black cultural products, it fails to really explain the phenomenon:

> It is too simplistic to argue that the insatiable white appetite for self-destructive black violence and exoticism explains the gangsta themes in rap.

Most likely it seems that Ogbar (2007) attempts to provide information, a chronological presentation, of where rap "has gone to," so to speak. Powerful economic and mainstream ideologies have infiltrated raps scene, causing pieces of it to morph into a capital-based essence of rap.

It should be noted that this thesis is attempting to show where rap has "come from," not historically, but where these cultural products are constructed from and it attempts to look into, most literally, the causes of why rap is rap, why it is so commonly asserted that there exists an intrinsic oppositional trait and what structure those lyrical flows sprout from. Further, I suggest that the essence of rap and hip-hop music may not simply be revisions of the surrounding world, complaints from an untamed and uncivilized people or a threat on mainstream ideas of life, but rather that the intricacies of rap music may most literally sprout from structural forces inherent in a unique American history of oppression and marginalization, exploitation and abuse, mainstream trepidation and alarm, which seeps its way into the cracks of subcultures and leaks out of their most mundane representations.

Rap as Moral Panic

> "They tryin' to shut down the clubs that my city rocks
> Now Mr. Mayor why would you enforce an ordinance?
> Music it saves lives, these kids out here are
> supporting it

> And through the art form we've learned the
> importance of community
> Truth to the youth so they know what's up
> Yup, and as a public school student
> I learned from my teachers, but became through my
> music
> Take that away, that's a vital"
> (Macklemore, 2009, track 1)

The products of rap and hip-hop culture are constantly put under the microscope and given the brunt of the blame as the underlying difference that provides evidence of America's social problems. The understanding of those who belong to rap culture as "others" is a normalized event. In this sense, the ongoing sensationalist event of rap and hip-hop in popular culture causes a divide between the acceptance and rejection of its products. People are often bifurcated between those of a minority who engage within the rituals, practices and norms of the culture; and the rest who stand in line with traditional values, opposed to those they fail to understand. The strength of differing perspectives is staggering.

While the view of public outcry, in this study, has been limited to those in the public eye, I assume that the sentiment is widespread, that it has become common to assume that the "difference" of rap culture is connotatively negative. This often implies that rap fails to truly be music in the specific sense of the word and that the messages rap promotes in its songs stand head and shoulders

above the rest of the entertainment world as monstrous negative influences. Further, that all the bullets from war movies, gore from video games, and biased news programs fail to stand up against the overpowering moral declension of a rapper's lyrical flows.

On November 23rd, 2003, host of the *O'Reilly Factor*, Bill O'Reilly invited two rappers on his program to talk about issues of the negative effects of rap on youth in America. Along with the two rappers O'Reilly had Salome Thomas-El, Principal of John Reynolds Elementary School in Philadelphia, who claimed that "gangsta music is extremely harmful to his inner-city students." The interview acted as a debate, with O'Reilly as a moderator. Although Bill O'Reilly's objective moderator stance did not last too long as he quickly joined Thomas-El's side, Rapper Dash ended the interview with a concluding statement that summed up many of the positives of rap that are constantly overlooked and bypassed, with people instead looking to cite the perceived negative characteristics of rap music:

DASH:

> Going along with what Cam'ron said, I think a lot of what we said was positive and informative.
> It's kind of obvious that maybe you don't understand that everything affects everything, whether it be movies, books, literature, a reporter on television, and if you're going to promote anything, I would think that

> to the culture of the kids that are watching, you'd promote the positive aspect of it.
>
> So, if you know there is negative in something, try to find the positive as opposed to always talking about the negative. That's the thing I don't understand, why we're criticized so hard within hip-hop.
>
> No one talks about the jobs we create, no one talks about the things we do within our community, and no one talks about the businesses we've done, how we've opened the doors and shown people that it's cool to be smart, it's cool to be a CEO, and it's cool to not to take advantage but to reap the benefits of all your labor and to do it fairly.
>
> I can't see how that could ever be considered a negative, and I'm disappointed in the fact that you would be thinking that.

Clearly a divisive border here, O'Reilly had Dash and Cam'ron on the program to exemplify the bad characteristics and effects of their music. He also used leading questions to frame Dash and Cam'ron as being devoid of a contrite and caring nature, by attempting to get them to admit that they do not care what consequences come from their music to the children who listen to them. Instead, both rappers articulate a perspective that shows the positive influences of rap in contrast to those who feel the weight of marginalizing governmental policy and

the saliency of institutionalized racial inequities. They also share cogently that they are providing successful, positive influences of how to succeed in the world that they are presented.

The previous anecdote has been included to show that both sides construct the image of groups in different and meaningful ways. While O'Reilly, Salome Thomas-El and countless other middle class journalists and pundits in the public eye construct the culture of rap and hip-hop one way, negatively; those engaged within the culture often construct it differently, positively; and in this case diametrically opposite. The point of this section, if nothing else, is to show incisively that the images of rap and hip-hop culture are indeed socially constructed.

This opposition to rap culture exists because of a difference of norms, values and - all in all - a "way of life." However, having ways of living that are "not correct," insists that there are consensus ways of living that should be followed, and that the majority of society holds, in its grasp, the correct way to live (Bogazianos, 2011). This way of social authority finds itself within the structures of our society that builds our knowledge and understandings of the world around us (Ferrell, 1996). These structures of authority do not only exist in hard forms of control, such as "prison cells and poverty, but by constructing and defending epistemologies of universality and 'truth'" (Ferrell, 1996, pg. 161). Constructing a truth about the way we live allows us to condemn others for the way they live. The remainder of this section will focus on the procedures and processes that

are necessary to construct this monopolized universality on what ways we can live.

Processes and Procedures

The essence of solidifying moral "truthiness" (Zimmer, 2005) - a word meaning a tacit, established, "gut-feeling" understanding of morality and originally coined by the host of the *Colbert Report,* Steven Colbert - comes in the crusades of those in the public eye. Bent on saving traditional values that public figures feel are slipping from America's fingers, they re-solidify the moral stances whose saliency was so easy to see "in the good ole days." These figures unleash what Howard Becker (1963) calls "moral crusades" on the rest of the public, by flooding their newspapers, TV stations, and radio talk shows with discourse representatively bifurcating what is moral from what is not.

However, it is the power of the public figure that allows them to solidify the truthiness of moral understanding. Moral crusades are dominated by those on the top of the social ladder who have access to media outlets, and this intertwined power - of the media, and of high rank image - helps to define and instill their moral understanding with a legitimacy that has powerful effects (Becker, 1963). In this sense, moral crusades operate in parallel with policy, as they are always configured by those at the top of the social structure and, therefore, always work to a marginalizing effect.

In order for this to take place, the moral crusade needs an effective user to propagate and apply the rhetoric. In this, the moral crusader is more concerned with the ends of a situation than with the means (Becker, 1963). The propagators' end encapsulates the moral stance of the message being revitalized and re-legitimized, and it is in this essence that they are "moral entrepreneurs"(Becker, 1963, pg.147). In the particular case of rap and hip-hop we can see evidence of the moral entrepreneurs' relentless workings. So far in this thesis we have seen the crusades of presidential candidates, journalists and the comedian Bill Cosby. All of these crusades are concerned little about the ins-and-outs of the culture itself, yet instead are driven by the need to homogenize moral understanding, cultural products, the way people dress and speak, and to construct the correct "way of life."

The crusades themselves always consist of an excoriation of a population that is different, marked as "others" or "strangers" who encapsulate the Hollywood vision of predators and criminals giving the public reason to fear their presence, their culture and the way they write and sing songs. The difference alone is hardly enough, but plaited with the perpetuated fear of the dangers of rap lyrics and gold chains these crusades become successful enough to draw public outcry demanding new interdictions to control the way others dress, imploring others to pull up those sagging pants. Clamoring to find moral justification they cite quality of life clauses claiming that pulling up those pants is more than a simple aesthetic difference, but that pulling up those pants will also pull those failed minds out of the gutter (Koppel, 2007).

Pushing the agenda of the rules allows for the moral crusader to seek out whatever evils may, in fact, push the boundaries of the traditional reigns of morality. As Becker states, the moral crusader is most interested in establishing further the rules of society. The content of the rules is their biggest concern, as they see themselves doing nothing but the work of "good." That pushing the rules further, in a more strict regiment, is the only way to ensure that although "what he sees is truly evil with no qualification," his own ethic to recreate common good is an "absolute ethic" (Becker, 1963). The crusader in this sense is interested in complete gentrification and may feel that his crusade may even be his calling; adamantly begging for you to see, that in the end this conversion will be good for you.

Bauman (1998) similarly exposes this constant perpetuation of fear mongering from public outcry, moral crusaders and moral entrepreneurs, while noting the power of media pundits in the direction and formation of this underlying notion of difference:

> If one judged the state of society after its dramatized representations not just the proportion of criminal to 'ordinary folk' would appear to exceed by far the proportion of the population already kept in jail, and not only the world as a whole would seem to be divided primarily into criminals and the guardians of order, but the whole of human life would seem to navigate the narrow gorge between the threat of

> physical assault and fighting back the potential attackers. The overall effect is the self-propelling of fear.
>
> (Bauman, 1998, pg.118-119)

Bauman (1998) in this profound excerpt questions the very idea that we are being attacked at all. Instead, he wonders the citing of moral declension, alarming crime waves, murderers, and the invasions of "others" solely exists in the machine of the media and the minds of the public.

Stanley Cohen (1980) affirms the same questions of legitimacy in the fear of others that Bauman (1998) does. He marks public degradation as a necessary tool of re-legitimizing traditional morality and traditional "ways of life":

> Deviants must not only be labeled but also be seen to be labeled; they must be involved in some sort of ceremony of public degradation. The public and visible nature of this event is essential if the deviant's transition to folk devil status is to be successfully managed. This staging requirement fits well with the common police belief that a good way to deal with adolescence, particularly in crows situation, is to 'show them up' or 'deflate their egos.' Formal as well as folk punishments involving public ridicule have been a feature of most systems of social control.
>
> (Cohen, 1980)

Citing that the public element of a group's degradation is the most important element in the appropriation of a moral crusade he reminds us that systems of social control often utilize these perpetuated mechanisms to create panic around certain groups. Without the publicity of the act of labeling the instillation of the meaning of the crusade is futile.

It is not difficult to see the attempt to create panic discourse that surrounds rap and hip-hop culture. From the noted outcries of disdain we see a structured attack on people of difference, and a relentless attempt to manipulate the perceptions and understandings of the public.

In order to truly be successful moral crusades must reach to the populations and offer unsolicited advice on the iniquitous nature of the invasion of others, as many people in homogenized America know little of the culture (Ferrell, 1996). Attacking the limited awareness of rap culture brings a new enemy, a new fear into the very vision of all the people who have never heard a rap song, or really listened to its lyrics; who assume that the harsh beats are evidence of a lesser people; those not quite civilized as "us", not quite intelligent, or advanced as "us", who are rearing back to, without restraint, attack "us."

Public Enemy Construction

> *Sometimes I ain't so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he ain't. Sometimes I think it ain't none of us pure crazy and ain't none of us*

pure sane until the balance of us talks to him that-a-way. It's like it ain't so much what a fellow does, but it's way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.

(William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying, p.233)

An unsolicited attack on a subculture starts by engaging the citizenry in the hostile ambiance created in a "we-feeling" (Bauman, 1998; Sennett, 1970). Separating those representing difference from people that consider themselves mainstream, normal and good people starts by bringing conflict into the vision of the people. Making the public aware of this attack on normalized sensibilities is rarely the work of one pundit or the conscious effort of officials but instead is the culmination of the effects of decades of misdirection which creates a structure where ideas and feelings towards difference are misunderstood, connotatively associated, and effectively deeply embedded within the structures of our knowledge and the discourse we use.

The words of the moral entrepreneur's crusade fall flat if they do not reach to a deeply embedded, far-reaching and underlying sensibility within the conditioning of people. The content of this section argues that there are two main conceptual mechanisms that are utilized to appeal to culturally constituted sensibilities within people, which are then used against "others." The first is the associative power of the machinery of language and ideology that has its hand in the construction of cultural discourse (Cohen, 1980; Hall et al, 1978; Ferrell,

1996; Turner and Surace, 1956). Secondly, I examine and outline the group-think power of the concept of the "outraged citizenry" and see that a conceptual version of outraged groups often galvanizes actual outrage (Ferrell, 1996, p.135).

Becker in his 1963 book writes: "People must be made to feel that something ought to be done about it. Someone must call the public's attentions to these matters, supply the push necessary to get things done, and direct such energies as are aroused in the proper direction to get a rule created" (pg. 162). He goes on to say that the consequence of a successful crusade of a moral entrepreneur is more than the establishment of a new grouping of rules and procedures but that it also comes with "the appropriate enforcement machinery" (pg.153). Of course, in this sense, he meant that in the course of a successful moral crusade also comes an established organization of enforcers for those new moral rules. In this sense, the moral crusade - from the established organization - becomes more than a whim, but most literally a societal institution. It becomes more than a person's preoccupation but instead solidifies itself as a part of society by garnering components such as employees, a building that they can work inside, and an official name that can most likely be reduced to an acronym.

Borrowing from Becker (1963), I too create my point of departure in this theoretical construct of an "appropriate enforcement machinery." However, I wish to consider here that enforcement itself can, and often does, manifest itself in much more subtle ways than societal institutions that are devoted to the policing of a rule; and that over time ways of thinking, knowledge structures of the world, and the ways we conceptualize society are contrived and construed in such a

way that can be every bit as oppressive and marginalizing as the brunt trauma that comes from police batons and the coercive force of institutional enforcers.

A 1956 study called "*Zoot-suiter's and Mexicans: Symbols in Crowd Behavior"* attempted through content analysis to show that symbols had drastic effects on the behavior of crowds and group-think acts. Through their study they measured the effects of negative connotations of the symbol of "Mexicans." Their findings documented the "extent of negative connotation which is accumulating about the symbol "Mexican." Also, the basic hypothesis they inquired about "that an unambiguously unfavorable symbol is required as the rallying point for hostile crowd behavior," was supported through the content analysis as the evidence shows that "the symbol 'Mexican' tended to be displaced by the symbol 'zoot-suiter' as the time of riots draw near" (Turner and Surace, 1956, p.19).

This study is very effective is determining that symbols are often embedded inside culture and society, and that symbols and symbolic terms can often have great effect on the association of certain groups of people. This is the point where this mechanism takes hold; that discourse is culturally defined and that in its process terms are instilled with negative or positive connotations helping to conceptualize space, groups of people and their morality. That, effectively, the *machinery of language and ideology* is manifested in underlying sensibilities and the discourse that mitigates those ideas. Take Ogbar's (2007, p.22) take on the constitution of terminology and discourse in relation to mainstream ideology:

> Though most whites were not middle class, the white reading public envisioned whiteness as closer to a middle class ideal. Drawn to the exoticism of the Negro, the seedy tales of black urban dysfunction, or the buffoonish antics of the coon, white consumers anticipated - in fact, demanded -stories of black people that reminded them of attributed descriptions that made whites distinct from blacks: civilized versus barbarian, industrious versus indolent, responsible versus careless, and intelligent versus stupid. Not only did these images affirm blackness as an organic and absolute Other, they simultaneously gave added meaning to whiteness and America's racial hierarchy.

This passage exemplifies the concept of a machinery of language and ideology that manufactures terminology that is not just descriptive of a group, but condemnation of moral alignment. Terminology that is often used to describe those within a subculture, while often connotatively good or neutral internally, is inscribed with qualities of moral bankruptcy and evil, externally. Ogbar (2007) uses terminology that is associated with the symbolic image of blackness; while acceptable and moral by the standards of those attempting blackness, the terms are utilized by mainstream ideology to effectively *other* them. This image, in mainstream language, creates an underlying ideology that neatly separates terminology in a dichotomy. Moral entrepreneurs embed their own descriptors in

their personal image which elicits words such as civilized, responsible and intelligent; rendering the image of blackness, the embodiment of purported difference, as diametrically opposite, and therefore as barbaric, careless and stupid.

> It is such that calling someone 'ghetto' represents a colloquial statement of one's crude behavior or otherwise unsophisticated and tactless style, which is implicitly black (Ogbar, 2007, p.30).

Ogbar (2007) goes on here to define what this manufactures: "A binary discourse on savageness and civilization provided a simplification of the complexities of race and power not only on a national stage but in international relations as well" (pg.22). This binary discourse is what is effectively created by a potent machinery of language and ideology. This connotative discourse manufactures implicative words that are linked to derogatory and pejorative connotations that 'profile' black and rap individuals. While binary discourse comes at the construction of social interaction, it is based on something much more fundamental which is seen to separate us at the core. It shows a representation of the belief that those invested in rap and black culture are somehow, in someway, intrinsically different, in a way that is either biological or environmental; and that the difference in the construction of discourse, or space, or oppression is in a way, justified.

The problem is that words become deeply ingrained with societal and cultural meaning that drives and constitutes our thoughts in direction to these

subcultures. The connotative meaning as part of the constitution of these words hardly takes place over night, but instead becomes solidified over generations. Discourse, then, is connotatively charged with meaning through a process that Alain Touraine calls "historicity." Touraine (1977) defines the term *historicity* as the following:

> The symbolic capacity of social actors to construct a system of knowledge and the technical tools that allow them to intervene in their own functioning, act upon themselves, and thereby produce society. (Touraine, 1977)

Moral entrepreneurs have the capacity, as social actors, to influence structures of knowledge and, in course, produce social understandings and conceptualizations that are well known. The discourse becomes actively and verbally associated with certain connotations and over time, the connotative element is infused into the word itself. After enough time, the associated meaning is forgotten and accepted as an original element of the word. Words such as "gangsta" become terms that are defined differently depending on one's locality and social group. The incorrect notions of barbarism and savagery they come to entail become descriptors used by the majority and they implicate entire minorities. The connotative terms themselves come to outline an understanding of a subculture that provides insight into their practices, social activities and philosophies, representative of their social identities and biological deficiencies.

Alternatively to constructing societal discourse - as another mechanism - moral entrepreneurs often, especially with the media, have the advantage of being able to construct the response of the public. While the response and panic of one well known media pundit can often cause a stirring response, an image of an *outraged citizenry* often provides enough moral charge to indict subcultures on counts of immorality and a lack of values. Ferrell (1996, p.135), shows in his book *Crimes of Style* that an outraged citizenry is often an important element as a catalyst in a moral crusade:

> The illusion of an outraged citizenry sets the context for a second image essential to the construction of graffiti as a social problem and to the creation of moral panic around it: the vision of a spreading, growing menace.

Ferrell (1996) shows us that in order to build a subculture as a moral threat the construct necessitates two images: the image of the *others* as ruthless, savage barbarians and the image of an angry response. Joining in the quest of a moral crusade is easier to accept when it is felt as part of a group. The elicited image of an angry, faceless mob outraged by the wrong-doings of immoral savages helps to legitimize the claims and to validate the purported rules of society.

Ferrell (1996) exemplifies this very process in his book which shows the rocky political battles of a subculture of graffiti artists in Denver against their local government. He reports that an editorial from Rocky Mountain News (June 20, 1990: 46) wrote: "A neighborhood stricken with graffiti is a neighborhood in which

the residents have lost - or are at risk of losing control." Citing that the neighborhood is *losing control* implies that the neighborhood is under attack from a group who wishes to destroy the right way to live, and that their values are bereft of the moral inclination and the widespread, successful values that traditional society has maintained for so long. Ferrell (1996) goes on to describe that messages like this form the faceless mob of outraged citizens and creates a polarization of cultures. It creates a relatable character that produces outrage in the media that the viewer can assimilate with and sympathize with. The similarities in character help to create a context that makes it easy for the viewer or reader to pick sides, as they feel when they read or watch adumbrated visions of their own image or person.

> If the intent is to polarize graffiti writers from the neighborhoods in which they operate and to create moral panic about them, a more effective message could hardly be imagined. The homeowner who wanders into her back alley to find there a fresh tag has learned to understand that tag in terms of personal threat and violation (Ferrell, 1996, p.145).

As we see from Ferrell's words, more than discourse is utilized to instill the fear of difference and a fear of losing society's moral direction. Often normalized rituals of a subculture come to represent dangerous difference which - through the context of the outraged citizen - helps to instill that fear into the perceptions of the public. Ferrell (1996) also shows a local newspaper article that follows the

practices of the subculture while applying the construct of an outraged citizenry, and the effects are palpable:

> When someone gets something on their garage door that may be from a tagger (someone who paints just their nickname), it still instills fear into the community about what this means. People think, "Is someone going to come and hurt me? (From Wolf, 1990a: 8; In Ferrell, 1996, pg.140)

Certainly here, it is not hard to see the similarities from one subculture to the next. If the painting of signs and symbols of one subculture is feared then we can assume that the practices and rituals of other cultures of difference are also feared. From the public outcry section we have seen that many attributed the ailments of society to the rap culture that has boomed over the last thirty years. People disavow and fear the practices of rap culture, such as the vulgar, sharp words and the harsh, fiery beats. An outraged citizenry has helped to correlate the harsh beats and vulgar words with the fear of a domestic attack on a shared way of life; the main opposing force of the constructed conviviality and utopian way of life that ostensibly exists today.

Of course, it is often forgotten that nearly all of the social ailments of today are problems that manifested themselves much before the growth in rap culture and that cop-killers, crime and drop-out rates are all things that existed well before rap came along. However, this line of reasoning rarely stops the moral

crusaders that seek out someone to blame or the perceptions of difference that label subcultures the beginnings of a newfound culture of violence.

The two images that are presented - threat and outraged citizenry - work to give officials a means to create laws that preserve traditional interests. Perception is the powerful item that provides justification for officials to outlaw difference from the mainstream ideology. The perception of the problem through the lenses of a *machinery of language and ideology* and the *outraged citizenry* constructs rap music as a social problem that effects us all; that taunts us at every harsh beat and rhythmic lyric; and that is constituted as a threat to our loved ones, but really portends the represented peril - that this specific difference will wipe away all the progress of humanity. Ferrell (1996, p.145) sums it up quite nicely, "The perception of graffiti writers as aggressive, subhuman vandals who rape and destroy their victims in turn justifies the campaign's legal and political clampdown on graffiti writers and graffiti writing."

Thus far, I have suggested that the response to rap can be understood as a moral panic in society. Incorrect connotative assumptions in words that describe subcultures create a transference in language; and that this transference of language erects a polarization of mainstream and subcultures that pits one against the other. This, in turn, forces mainstream ideology to not only insinuate that subcultures have nothing to offer, but that they are dangerous to the "correct" way of life.

Sensationalism versus Moral Panic

It is important to look at the validity of the use of moral panic. Since its conception, from Cohen (1980), the term has been used frequently and has been criticized for its wide range of applicability and saturation in academic discourse. So much so, that Cohen himself wrote about its overuse in an article called, "Whose side are we on? The undeclared politics of moral panic theory" (2011).

While it may often be the case that critical social issues are sensationalized in popular discourse, moral panic has been misused as an academic defense mechanism (Altheide, 2009). Moral panic has often been used to decry any sensationalistic event perpetuated by media pundits or overly excitable officials. Further, moral panic is often misused as a politically charged construct that represents and pushes agendas for certain polemical issues. In light of this, it is important to take a look at moral panic theory and have some structure that allows one to frame an event as "moral panic."

Cohen states that since the number of monikered moral panics have massively increased and the number of academic case studies of moral panic have seen a sharp rise, then there should be some structure to defining moral panic (2011, pg.239). In this article Cohen ends up agreeing with the suggestion of Critcher (2009) on his belief that moral panics require a "prior criterion or typology" that would help to legitimize equating events with moral panic theory. Cohen (2009) describes the criterion that Critcher suggests:

> He identifies three dimensions of 'discursive construction' for distinguishing between forms of moral regulation or between regulation and panic. Imagine ranking (high/medium/low) each of the following dimensions: 1) the perceived threat to moral order posed by an issue; 2) the extent to which it is seen to be amenable to social control; and 3) how far it invites ethical formation (Cohen, 2011, pg. 242).

Following the practice that Cohen and Critcher have erected I offer my own theoretical construct through these parameters ensuring that constructing rap as a moral panic is structurally sound. First, we have the "perceived threat to moral order posed by an issue." In the public outcry section of this thesis I demonstrated comedians, high level officials, media pundits, journalists and the general public have accepted or generated a perpetuated fear of rap culture. Thus, I would argue there exists a large fear of the threat to moral order. In this sense, this criterion would be distinguished as high ranking.

Critcher's second criterion asks us to consider "the extent to which it is seen to be amenable to social control." Since June 2007 "sagging" - wearing pants lower than the hips, an aesthetic of rap and black culture - has been against the law in Delcambre, LA (Koppel, 2007). While outlawing rap itself is a task that has not yet been attempted implementing controls on the aesthetics or those who listen to rap is incessantly in the view of government officials. High level officials often have tried to excoriate and limit the companies of the industry

of music who sell and distribute this music with harsh and radical themes (Bogazianos, 2012; Ogbar, 2007) and constructing their practices and rituals as social ailments is the beginning of formal control. It is also important to remember that rap culture is highly integrated with black culture, which has sustained much formal control in attempts to maintain the status quo social order. Black culture itself has sustained the "prisonization" of its people and therefore, a perpetuated and ingrained disadvantage (Clemmer, 1940). This perpetuated disadvantage - deep seated in the construct of today's society - still currently works to limit the rituals, practices and daily lives of the impoverished. This influx of mundane and formal social controls demands a high ranking for criterion two; that officials believe that rap culture is amenable to social control.

Lastly, Critcher asks us to examine how far it invites ethical formation. Without again evaluating moral entrepreneur-ship, we must note that moral entrepreneurs and their crusades are ideal examples of the self-formation of ethical principle and a relentless incursion to re-establish these values as the values of society. The establishment of moral crusades, a machinery of language and ideology, and an outraged citizenry shows us that not only is there an attempt of ethical self-formation, but also that there are designed sophisticated mechanisms to erect these notions of authority in moral and social language.

We see here that rap as a moral panic is structurally sound when analyzed against prior criteria and that the criteria proposed are easily met and surpassed. Establishing rap culture as a moral panic allows us to fully grasp the effects of moral crusades and perpetuated fear through the use of the media. It

also allows us to understand that the use of the ethical reformations that moral entrepreneurs protect are indeed self-created, and undoubtedly, self-interested.

The Modern Leper

> A cripple walks amongst you, all you tired human beings
> He's got all the things a cripple has not, two working arms and legs
> And vital parts fall from his system and dissolve in Scottish rain
> Vitally, he doesn't miss them; he's too fucked up to care
>
> (Frightened Rabbit, 2008, track 1)

Media-driven images of the underclass show a deteriorated culture causing it to become the aim of numerous political initiatives. In an effort to clean up the streets low social class subcultures are targeted by middle class righteous crusades against irresponsibility to protect the myth of the American dream. Often, from the media, the underclass is portrayed negatively and associated with symbols that help maintain images of dangerous and feckless leeches. It is easy for media pundits to attack those who have no means to fight back and no media representation to spin the hatred in the other direction. In this light, the

lumpen class is a detriment to society - embodied both as petty criminals and super-predators - and often accused as subjects which subsists of unique biological qualities that pose a threat to mainstream notions of life.

Poverty is often a characteristic of the demonized class of today, however as we have seen in this thesis, subcultures are often labeled as having similarly demonized traits. The title of this section was chosen to represent the nature of the public outcry, which influences the ostensibly necessary policies that administer dominating and far-reaching social control. The title, which comes from the band Frightened Rabbit and is taken from the number one track on their 2008 album, utilizes ambiguous lyrics that make the original meaning difficult to discern. Looking around the internet for alternate insight into the lyrics' meanings I stumbled upon others discussing its meaning. One patron of the website described the song's meaning as taking the form of psychological disease and mental illness, loneliness and depression:

> First off, it's modern leper. Not a leper of old, where you risk losing body parts. In our society today, most of our focus is on emotional and mental wellbeing. So a modern leper is someone who's losing himself in that way, not physically.
> (HiringParanoia, songmeanings.net)

Another user, pseudo-named machinefourteen, takes a different approach positing that the musical lyrics tell a literal story:

> Here's my theory.. Maybe the song is about someone in need of an organ donor? First part talks about how sick he is. He's falling a part due to his failing organ that has started to slowely [sic] take his life. The next part, "Well, is that you in front of me?Coming back for even more of exactly the same.. You must be a masochist,to love a modern leper On his last leg." I think the masochist refers to the much needed donor that finally came along.

Obviously up for much debate, the ambiguous lyrics of the song represents different meaning to different listeners. Personally, I suspect the lyrics of the song represent a depiction of the current social environment. Pointing to neoliberal modernity and its inclination to ostracize small populations by stuffing them into categories of social class, and by extension, categories of lower value, worth and entitlement.

While the substance of lyrics is often up for debate and attributed meanings are often based on conjecture, the Modern Leper elicits some imagery which helps to further symbolize the message of this section. Firstly, the image of the leper shows the inclination of mainstream middle class America to look at subcultures of difference as a disease or an inseparable biological deficiency. Equating leprosy with difference creates a visual aid that represents the unease and outright fear that shines through, causing middle class America to hope that some government department will create a prophylactic nostrum that cures the

epidemiological spread. Similarly effective, is the word "modern," which temporally situates the sense of the fear of disease by locating it as a current phenomenon. The concept, therefore is an anachronism, as the descriptive word rips the object out of its time period and, hence, forces us to re-conceptualize the meaning of "leper." The terms together contrive imagery that points the reader to imagine a current form of disease that plagues our everyday lives, and it is in this sense that I use the term the modern leper to expose the existing underlying fear of difference and an anger towards subcultures that experience the world in alternate ways.

A rejection of difference is not uncommon. As the ideology of cities and populations of people become more homogenized, they in turn, become more comfortable with traditional practices, rituals and values. Groups that seem to differ from these norms, represent a threat to the way life ought to be, by threatening to reconfigure the normalized aspects of homogenized life that people have grown to be comfortable with. Richard Sennett, a centennial sociology professor at the London school of economics, completed a study called "Uses of Disorder" (1970), in an attempt to analyze the contemporary life on the urbanization of modern cities and to "raise the alarm" about the fall of the "public man." Covering the idea that a utopia, engineered through a rationalized plan of immaculate urban development was robbing the essence of life from the lives of people, Sennett (1970) delves into the concept that society is becoming a reality that has become more intolerant to new things and ways of living. (Bauman, 1998; Sennett, 1970).

Sennett continued to analyze American cities in this study of the impending takeover of "homogenization." His analyzed findings revealed a growing commonality among the citizenry: "the suspicion against others, the intolerance of difference, the resentment of strangers, and the demands to separate and banish them, as well as the hysterical, paranoiac concern with 'law and order', all tend to climb to their highest pitch in the most uniform, the most racially, ethnically, and class-wise segregated, homogenous local communities" (Bauman, 1998, p.47).

Sennett noticed a growing "we-feeling" (Bauman, 1998) that incessantly works to polarize those who are accepted from those who are different. He defines this "we-feeling" as a certain, growing outlook on life that demands similar norms, values, physical aesthetics, ways of talking, rituals and practices; and that retaining different characteristics solidifies one as an outsider (Bauman 1998 & 2007; Sennett, 1970). This realization of unaccepted difference led sociologist Bauman (1998) to conclude:

> In a homogenous locality it is exceedingly difficult to acquire the qualities of character and the skills needed to cope with human difference and situations of uncertainty; and in the absence of such skills and qualities it is all too easy to fear the other, simply for being an-other - bizarre and different perhaps, but first and foremost unfamiliar, not-readily-

> comprehensible, not full fathomed,
>
> unpredictable.
>
> (Bauman, 1998, pg. 47)

Similarly, Jock Young proposed the concept of the "bulimic society" (Young, 2003). As a society that represents great friction between the purported social and economic ideals, the internalization of dog-eat-dog economic values relentlessly undermines values of love, peace, liberty and equality. The economic rules that have become solidified as principles come to bifurcate the haves from the have-nots. This creates borders of resentment and hostility which seeks to constantly corrupt values of existing together with acceptance. These economic principles create a distinct polarization that pits one side against the other, in an endless battle for the "righteous" winners to declare mainstream values and norms. Young (2003) notes, in his quote about bulimic society, that while society's economic principles have declared reified borders between social classes, that in a real sense, it is only socially constructed borders that differentiate us, and that, in depth, differences are few and far between:

> I want to suggest that it is the bulimic nature of late modern societies which helps explain the nature and tenor of the discontent at the bottom of the social structure. It is rooted quite simply in the contradictions between ideas that legitimate the system and the reality of the structure that constitutes it. But the tensions between ideals and reality exist only because of the general and manifest awareness of

> them. Both the punitive anger of the righteous and the burning resentment of the excluded occur because the demarcation lines are blurred, because values are shared and space is transfixed, because the same contradictions of reward and ontology exist throughout society, because the souls of those inside and those outside the 'contented minority' are far from dissimilar, sharing the same desires and passions, and suffering the same frustrations, because there is no security of place nor certainty of being, and because differences are not essences but mere intonations of the minor scales of diversity (Young, 2003, p.398-99).

Thus far, we have looked at difference and its lack of acceptance in an increasingly constructed homogenized society. This is accomplished by maintaining an understanding of the common norm as increasingly becoming a mandate to refuse difference of social practice and rituals, and that difference of norms and values are evidence of the corruption in today's youth. Pundits within the media often lend their hand to this misunderstanding that corruption of proper traditions and morals is becoming rampant, with an ever-increasing chance of growing crime waves and dangerous hoodlums that wander the streets, imploring that we need more protection, more stringent laws and longer punishments. Even mundane forms of social control are becoming popular as fear of different groups becomes greatly propagated in campaigns for personal safety (Bauman, 1998). Bauman (1998, p.122) takes it further, saying, "Burglar alarms, the watched and

patrolled neighborhood, the guarded condominium gates - they all serve the same purpose: keeping the strangers away."

This conclusion to the criticisms section has been implemented to serve as a presentation of the idea that the fear of different populations is extant in society today. Showing that maintained fear provides the imagery of people of difference as "modern lepers" which demands, through societal values, that difference be apprehended and gentrified; and that there are many people in society that do not only fail to see rap culture and its cultural products as a necessary area of study, but are all too firm representations that "it is all too easy to fear the other, simply for being an-other" (Bauman, 1998, p.47).

Surely populations of difference and subcultures that represent alternate ways of living and seeing the world are worth more than dismissal under the guise of unfounded reasonings from misinformed media pundits and a scared citizenry (Ferrell, 1996). The study of a subculture's cultural products can offer profound insights into the experiences of marginalized populations, which in turn, if nothing else gives an in-depth avenue into the living reactions of groups that feel the weight of oppressive policies and the indignation of a society premised on homogeneity. It gives us a closer examination into how other populations survive, the effects of propagated fear, bifurcating economic principles, other perpetuations of ethnic inequity and provides revealing visions into the vast cosmos of human behavior.

Chapter 4

Why Studying Culture Matters

> *Rejection and exclusion are humiliating and meant to be such; they are meant to result in the rejected/excluded accepting their social imperfection and inferiority. No wonder the victims mount a defence. Rather than meekly accepting their rejection and converting official rejection into self-rejection, they prefer to reject their rejecters (*Bauman*, 1998, pg. 126).*

The authors of the authenticity debates, and the moral crusaders who rally against rap have a glaring similarity that shines through their analyses of the deeper meaning of rap and hip-hop music: that the music and meaning of rap is the culmination of the efforts of personal discretion. They fail to reach a conclusion that the products of culture are more than the dissolute morality of a minority, or a conscious attempt to validate oneself, or any process beyond simple personal discretion that has but to rest on personal elements or actors. Perhaps, we are seeing evidence of the belief that culture itself is bound by personal discretion and responsibility; that the cultural products we produce are

nothing more than conscious, adumbrated revisions of the environment that surrounds us but this assertion is far beyond the scope of this project.

However, the point is that we must be able to look at a much more powerful understanding of rap, hip-hop and other subcultures then commonly asserted. While using rap to prove authenticity or using lyrics to provide direct oppositional messages are worthy considerations, both rest heavily on individual discretion and personal responsibility. The origins of 'keeping it real' or 'selling out' (Ogbar, 2007) are greater than the individual as a cultural phenomenon but their choice in the matter is thought to be, undoubtedly, in a personal and conscious sense. While these certainly consist of a piece of the puzzle they surely underscore a deep-seated and embedded element that is much more potent; it surely consists of all the years of turmoil and oppression, feeling and emotion, happiness and loss; not just an individual's dejection, but the structural rejection of a population. The very construct of subculture itself.

This exploration is predicated on a premise that was highlighted in Bogzianos's book (2012) where he works to associate the rap 'game' with the crack 'game.' He focused on the fact that crack was hyper-criminalized by increasing the punishment of it to one hundred times that of powder cocaine which established the 100-1 ratio. However, studies have found that crack cocaine is actually less pure, and therefore, less dangerous than powder cocaine (Bogzianos, 2012; Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Reinarmen & Levine, 2004).

It becomes clear that implemented policy of this sort worked heavily to marginalize people that can only afford cheaper narcotics of lesser purity. Again,

Bogazianos' (2012) insights came from one line that caught his attention vigorously and incessantly, that refused to leave his head, and caused him to write about it. As, Bogzianos (2012) admitted, it consumed him. I would like to believe that I came to my conclusions of my own accord and capacity, however, I experienced a similar beginning. For years, the nature of rap and hip-hop have intrigued me, imploring me to explore the cultural meanings behind those fiery words and sounds. However, my own personal structure for such a project eluded me and the lines of theoretical progression proved difficult to match up until the words of Bauman's book (1998) echoed to me: "Reject the rejecters."

Sykes and Matza's (1957) *Condemning the Condemners* came to my vision when picking the title Rejecting the Rejecter's as a potential conflict. However, what I contend extends beyond the boundaries of personal neutralization techniques and although it can exist in the realm of personal and conscious acts, it concomitantly extends past that which a person normally ponders and finds itself coming to a conclusion: that all rap matters. The study of all rap lyrics, and perhaps all lyrics and all cultural products, are representative of more than random inventions of meaningless worthless banter, but are in a most literal and concrete way, 'artifacts' of culture, that - though perhaps subjective and arbitrary - are important because they are, in fact, so human; and in turn, so they leak of these human conditions.

Cyclical Meaning

> *At the heart of all critical theories and methods is a critique of ideology and power. Ideologies (whether political, economic, or religious) can mystify reality, obscure relations of power and domination, and prevent people from grasping their situation in the world. Specific forms of consciousness may be called ideological when they are invoked to sustain or legitimate particular institutions or social practices. When these institutional arrangements reproduce inequality, domination, and human suffering, the aims of critical theory are broadly emancipatory.* (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 229)

Rap, at its most basic concept reaches to the utility of representation. It is common for writers, academics and any individual describing the positive aspects of rap and hip-hop music to relay that - like all music - the lyrical flows catch visions of the times, delineating social, cultural and political environments that, if nothing else, show us a specific way that one group of people, or even just one artist, views the world.

The art of lyrical creation is said to stem from the world the artists are forced to face and, in a sense, lyrics "cannot be separated from the social,

political, or cultural context from which it develops" (Ogbar, 2007, pg.144). Most agree, that if nothing else, rap lyrics depict their surroundings often in elements of political and economic disadvantage and feelings of inequity. Music can be a tool to be heard for those pockets of society that have no discernible forum for discontent. In this light, it is important we understand that rap and hip-hop lyrics often come from a source of despair and exploitation which manifests themselves in the unseen corners of subcultures. These traits are not as often recreated in middle class lives and, even if they were, middle class lives often have better knowledge and resources to let their their discontent be known. Other authors echo this sentiment such as Ogbar:

> The dire conditions, however, of black communities shaped by rising unemployment, declining social programs, police terror, institutionalized racism, crime and a burgeoning drug trade fomented alarm among many young African Americans. (Ogbar, 2007, p. 109)

The author expresses that the structural disadvantages become institutionalized and this implies a historical structure of inequity that reveals more than a basic representation of one's surroundings. He suggests that the lyrics themselves are evident of something more structural, as they are products of historical precedents and official decisions that make up something greater than personal discretion and understanding.

Similarly, Jeff Ferrell and Mark Hamm (1994) illustrate a similar sentiment about the lyrical content of rap and hip-hop music. They too suggest that there are underlying precedents that manufacture and infuse themselves in music:

> Rappers record the everyday experiences of pimping, prostitution, child abandonment, AIDS and drugs. Other rappers deal with deeper institutionalized problems such as poverty, racial conflict, revisionist history books, the demand for trivial consumer goods, the exploitations of disenfranchised blacks through military service, and black dislocation from Africa. And still other rap songs lay bare the desperate and often violent nature of ghetto life, as played out in individual and collective fear, sadly misogynistic and homophobic fantasies, street-killings, and significantly, oppressive harassment by police patrols. (Ferrell and Hamm, 1994, p. 3)

Again, we see the idea of reaching to representations of the surrounding world as the authors point to the obvious personal discretions in recording conceptualizations of the environment of the socio-political world. However, like Ogbar's (2007) passage we also see an attempt to reach deeper, by insinuating that there is an extant economic and social disproportion in the lives of those who come from black communities in contrast to others. The authors maintain that black American individuals often experience the daunting effects of historical

disproportionate policies that have worked their ways into the lives of millions, and that these conditions and their results resound through generations of history and have an effect not only on their existences but the way they represent their lives.

It is also important that we confirm that this black American marginalization still exists heavily today. That these racial inequities hardly exist as historical precedents, trapped in previous eras and limited to textbooks, but that instead current oppressive mechanisms may manifest themselves in a much different capacity. It is erroneous to correlate the emergence of a few rich black Americans with the eradication of disproportionate economic situations, inequitable social conditions and a history of lopsided power imbalances. Rather, historical racial inequities will forever reverberate through time by casting effects that are never quite in the past, but instead, exacting itself in new and duplicitous ways. Tricia Rose (1994) outlines that rap and black cultures are still caught in webs of exploitation:

> Rap's stories continue to articulate the shifting terms of black marginality in contemporary American culture. Even as rappers achieve what appears to be central status in commercial culture, they are far more vulnerable to censorship efforts than highly visible white rock artists, and they continue to experience the brunt of the plantation-like system faced by most artists in the music and sports industries. Even as

> they struggle with the tension between fame and rap's gravitational pull toward local urban narratives, for the most part, rappers continue to craft stories that represent the creative fantasies, perspectives, and experiences of racial marginality in America. (Rose, 1994, p.3)

Rose (1994) is hardly the only author to notice the marginalization that is represented in areas of black commercial success. Bogazianos (2012) similarly notes that the music industry creates contracts that consume artists' creative capacity and through tricky legal status, these corporations can often evade any legal pursuance (Bogazianos, 2012, p. 15). In this sense, artists who achieve commercial success face levels of marginalization that black community members living in poverty face. An escape from poverty fails to escape the socially constructed shackles of being an exploitable minority, and continues to share the experience of abuse.

> In many ways, rap's reflexive stance toward its own commercialization began with A Tribe Called Quest's album, The Low End Theory. Frustration with the industry was summed up in one line that has since become famous: "Industry rule number four thousand and eight / Record company people are shady." By vocalizing the shadiness of record companies, Tribe was setting a trend: knowledge of the industry and the

> way it 'really' works is a kind of capital that, if not gained, understood, and heeded, can be one's downfall.... Tribe suggests a number of prominent themes that emerged later: frustration with a business perceived as fundamentally corrupt; duplicity that is worse than physical violence; the necessity of 'knowing the deal,' as a means of protection and self-defense' and, perhaps most significant, the role of the contract in binding one, in perpetuity, to bad deals. (Bogazianos, 2012, p. 109)

Bogazianos (2012) points to something revealing here. That the violence, which is experienced through exploitation within the industries of music - which often consists of ways out of poverty - was so humiliating and devastating to many artists recording their representations of the ghetto and their experienced oppressive conditions, that violence itself became the necessary response. The avenue of music itself presented a different form of exploitation and "a different kind of violence - that of the industry" (Bogazianos, 2012, pg. 117).

The conclusion that is being reinforced is that oppression and marginalization of black and rap subcultures exists historically, ringing through the decades, and also presently manifesting itself in new ways. This constitutes an interweaving balance which erects marginalization from historical and structural avenues, while combining them alongside current conscious and oppressive societal institutions. Yet further, what is being exemplified is the

resulting practices and the lasting effects which come from this relentless double marginalization:

> At bottom, crime and punishment in twenty first century America have come to provide whole sets of interpretive schema through which social life is now perceived, thereby creating overlapping webs of values, meanings and beliefs that radiate far beyond official policies and documents, and thread their ways into people's daily lives and cultural creations. (Bogazianos, 2012, pg. 8)

Bogazianos (2012) beautifully outlines the previous idea; that institutional policies themselves have effects that demonstratively and duplicitously spread through the lives of innocent victims; that policy interdictions, no matter the context, have oppressive qualities that seek out to limit the practices and rituals, the very "ways of life" of certain populations of people. Although these policies on the outside are often developed from *common good* intent they can have debilitating unintended consequences that over time become institutionally solidified and leak into the very construct of the effected subcultures.

The power of unintended consequences is through its internalization. Through *historicity,* consequences leak into the construct of the culture they are imposed upon; with unintended effects causing ripples which leaves remnants of destruction in areas of life that already needed help, destroying already unstable populations' ways of life and erasing feelings of communal responsibility. Robert

Merton (1968) wrote an article outlining the overt and covert effects that policy can have on groups of people. Naming it "Manifest and Latent Functions" he wrote:

> This is the rationale for the distinction between manifest functions and latent functions; the first referring to those objective consequences for a specified unit which contribute to its adjustment or adaptation and were so intended; the second referring to unintended and unrecognized consequences of the same order. (Merton, 1968)

Clearly, Merton (1968) shows two forms of consequence that are products of institutional policy: manifest and latent. He also gives us insight to the idea that even the intended effects of policies that effectively palliate the condition also create avenues of unintended action that leak into the chasms of society; even in their latent style manifesting themselves destructively.

While the original intent of policies are conspicuously mechanisms of power hierarchies themselves, it is often the unintended functions that have the most profound effect by leaking into the construct of a subculture's existence and forcing the populations with no forum for discontent to feel its hidden but very real wrath. Most obviously, this concept has been infused into cultures throughout history in a multitude of ways. We can easily see the extraordinary consequences that unintended policy thrusts upon different subcultures, only decades later, to turn into an ordinary way of life. Major policies have potent and

far-reaching ripples that disrupt subcultures and that create new ones, exemplified by crack cocaine policy, the drug war, the sex trade, gun trade, and so on. The black market concept for criminalized products itself is the by-product of the process of criminalization and although the effects are within sight and simple at times, they relentlessly instill themselves in much more meaningful, condemning and disastrous ways. Bogazianos (2012) in one of the best excerpts from his book echoes a similar sentiment:

> Even if these changes become normalized over the long term, however, an inescapable fact remains: a near forty year experiment in mass incarceration will have sociocultural effect unbounded by the timeline of official decision making. Indeed one of the central premises of this book is that even the most obviously 'instrumental' policies have cultural lives that extend far beyond their intended targets in ways and degrees to which neither their original designers nor their most strident opponents could ever have controlled, predicted, or, as is often the case, even perceived. My premise implies that crime has cultural lives, that culture has criminal lives, and that the policies affecting both never start and end with passage and repeal. Instead, crime and punishment get woven into existing webs of meaning, creating, in the process,

> patchworks of culture and policies that violently overlap and work at cross-purposes. Laws intended to target the same things wind up trumping each other, and policy efforts aimed at supporting community cohesion wind up systematically picking it apart, all of which, all the while, become absorbed - often imperceptibly - into social practices as seemingly insignificant as lyrical flows.
>
> (Bogazianos, 2012, pg. 144-45)

Here we see the point of departure for my thesis, that these "cultural lives" that policies assume are often the bases and columns that buttress the essence of many subcultures. The predilections of the voting public and the officials that push them to win elections often fail to grasp the effects of policies that spur inconceivable consequences. These consequences are then absorbed into the very cultures they wreak havoc upon, creating in essence and over time the culture itself, in which the people have forgotten - over decades - the social and political elements of the policy. It therefore, is erroneously reduced to a purely natural element: a subculture's practices and the way they experience life, the songs they write and the artwork they paint, the gold chains, the nice cars and rap lyrics are purported evidence of individual choice and naturalness. In a natural state of personal choice, responsibility and discretion come of wanton debauchery and vice, pointing, not just to bad decision making, but to biological flaws that sends the mainstream machine of ideology scrambling to invent and

implement new and more despotic instances of social control. This social control limits musical creativity and sagging pants, and increases the severity of punishment on poverty by using the tools and powers of criminal justice and attempts to solve delicate social issues with the brute, authoritative and crippling force of complete governmentality.

Typically assumed that subcultures exist differently in their natural state and even that they even are intrinsically different from us it is mandated that we create policy that oversees and polices them, by enforcing rules that help them live civilized lives and retain cultural values that are more assimilated to mainstream values. Interpreting this in a more linear imagery it is commonly assumed that the creation of policy begins with out of control sectors of society which displays the evils, ailments and flaws that need to be controlled and molded. These evils and inherent flaws are represented in the practices and rituals that differ from conventional society. What this thesis is suggesting is, in a state of modern society, we see that the cycle is actually inverted; with policy maintained as both the beginning and end of the cycle of evolving cultural lives it is possible that policy creates subcultures that need to be policed more than subcultures require policy of social control. The social policies that are enacted often have ramifications that cannot be traced or predicted, and these acts of violence regularly marginalize groups of people, with lasting effects that echo through the decades to come. Latent effects of policy, in tandem with severe punishment, fractures society and creates pieces of social life that have splintered off. Falling to the lowest ranks of the social hierarchy, policy indelibly

labels these splinters of culture as the iniquity of society. Further, the unconventional and unsightly practices that are developed in the face of this destructive policy are dealt with by making new and increasingly draconian policies and laws. Perhaps, the gold chains, the atavistic music and ways of dressing and speaking sprouted out of decades of institutionalized violence. Perhaps, policy initiatives that leveled black American communities necessitated a new value system that rejected the systems from which they already had been expunged. Perhaps, laws and policies create criminals more than they catch them.

It is with this basis that I insist that the remnants of oppressive policy which echo for decades create subcultures that are intimately aware of the devastating structural and conscious oppressions, and that conscious "ways of life" in splintered subcultures manifest themselves with acute awareness of the structural damage. That "ways of life," in this sense, are always a response and a fundamental idea to take control of one's life. Even with little socio-political power and no forum for discontent an individual can withhold their approval of mainstream existence, and effectively, reject their rejecters. It is here that rap lyrics are most literally and concretely "artifacts" of culture as the practices, rituals and norms of a subculture are created with and have infused inside the context of structural and conscious oppression, and violence. This most literally insists that social change and practice becomes part of the individual, and by extension, is melted into the construct of the lyrics themselves showing that devastating policy aided in its construct and its very formation. While rap has a

history that predates its existence within the United States it is very possible that this genre, which exploded in the 80's and 90's, has become fashioned together as a semblance of a medium for discontent and as a way to respond to the destructive measures of government policy. While a history of rap and hip-hop culture is not within the scope of this project there are many authors who have constructed excellent chronologies and understandings of the origins of the music. Many of the authors that have been quoted in this thesis have sections and chapters devoted to rap and hip-hop history, and they can be found in the reference section of this thesis.

All Rap Matters (Rejecting the Rejecters)

Up in first class, laugh even though its not funny
See a white man wonder how the fuck I got money
While he sit at coach, hate to see me walk past em
Young black pants sag, headphones blastin'
Know what he askin', "How did he manage?"
"With all the cards against him, he used them to his advantage!"
Slang we be speakin' probably soundin' like Spanish
Then I fuck they heads up when a nigga show manners

Some New York niggas thought it was funny callin' us

Bama

Laughin' at the grammar cause they didn't understand

us

Must've thought we slow, but little do they know

I came up here to take advantage of that shit ya'll take

for granted

(J.Cole, 2011, track 6)

Other authors have not shied away from mentioning rap and hip-hop music as a response to turmoil and oppression that haunted the black American population for centuries by becoming deeply ingrained within their mindsets and schemas of the organization of life. In fact, Rose (1994) mentions this very concept in her book Black Noise*:*

> Poor people learn from experience when and how explicitly they can express their discontent. Under social conditions in which sustained frontal attacks on powerful groups are strategically unwise or successfully contained, oppressed people use language, dance and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion.. These cultural responses to oppression are not safety valves that protect and sustain the machines of

> oppression. Quite to the contrary, these dances, languages, and musics produce communal bases of knowledge about social conditions, communal interpretations of them and quite often serve as the cultural glue that fosters communal resistance. (Black Noise, 1994, p. 99-100)

Rose (1994) shows that rap and hip-hop lyrics are often more than ephemeral visions of the surrounding world but that they are coherently grounded and that they heavily correlate with the inequities of current social conditions. She elicits that the conscious socio-cultural acts and representations that are produced (music, dance, etc), are often used to perpetuate different lines of ideology and conceptualizations of the organization of life. This is a powerful heuristic tool for many of the poor community, showing them that their poverty and ostracized culture from mainstream acceptance is a relatively new phenomenon. The afro-Peruvian rapper Immortal Technique echoes a similar sentiment of the rampant impoverishment that plagues many black and Latino communities being created in the wake of destructive policy: "Poverty has nothing to do with our people. It's not in our culture to be poor. That's only been the last 500 years of our history" (2001, track 10).

While Rose (1994) gets close to finding a pathway and an origin of the lyrical content of rap and hip-hop music she stops from going farther than a concept of "representation," in which - although acknowledging that rap consists of an oppositional attribute as a fundamental element - refuses to extend to

something more. However, a complete understanding of rap and hip-hop lyrics as artifacts of culture demands further examination.

It is paramount that a deeper level of the play between structure and agency are examined here. The structure versus agency debate is hardly new conceptual information which begs the question of its absence in lyrical research. As presented before, it is posited here that rap and hip-hop lyrics are cultural artifacts that are evidence of oppression and marginalization and that the creation of cultural products from marginalized communities are most literally infused with the struggles of history.

More specifically, there is an underlying structure that drives, contains and limits the possibilities of cultural qualities and quantities. The construct created under the effects of the relentless and historical elements of policy provides the very structure for what is consciously possible in the cultural interpretations of life, and this consistently drives a subculture's rituals of dance, music and lyrical verses. More intimately, we are limited by the actions of those around us and our "ways of life" are reactions. They are only functional in the sense that they mold to others' ways of existence. How we live is always constituted as a social web of connections that pulls and pushes the essences of life. It is in this sense that the way people live is not solely a choice, but a reaction and response - fitting, malleable and functional - fashioning and forming, constantly modified into the way others live theirs; and that the difference of one culture can never be divorced from another, but is driven by the existence of "others", as fittingly as Jean-Paul Sartre described the life of the alter ego:

> The very presence of alter ego in this world puts me to shame and remains a constant cause of my anguish. I cannot be all I want to be. I cannot do all I want to do. My freedom fizzles out. In the presence of alter ego - that is, in the world - my being for myself is also, ineradicably, being for the other. When acting, I cannot but take into account that presence, and hence also those definitions, points of view, perspectives that it entails. (Scheutz, 1948)

Here we see that what is experienced is a *cultural functionality* that wrestles with the idea of existing with others by creating coagulated tension among the borders that separates "ways of life," endlessly molding those borders, legitimizing elements of life, and tacitly denouncing others. Fitting between the borders of cultures in geographical proximity and existing around one another as a piece of an entire contextualized puzzle; no escaping the constant barrage of effect where culture pushes on others and unfailingly others push back. In short, *cultural functionality* represents the effect of cultures upon one another as societies and subcultures are undoubtedly connected sprouting from the common trait of the social component. Jean Baudrillard, in his book "*System of Objects"* demonstrates this concept in an understanding of how atmospheric values work to bring warmth, emotion and "rhythm" to a room. Similarly, I attempt to bring this concept to understanding culture and subculture:

> The combination, matching and contrast of tones are the real issues when it comes to the relationship between colour and atmosphere... colours are now contrasting ranges of shades, their value has less and less to do with their sensory qualities, they are often dissociated from their form, and it is their tonal differences that give a room its 'rhythm.' Just as modular furniture loses its specific functions so much that at the logical extreme its value resides solely in the positioning of each movable element, so likewise colours lose their unique value, and become relative to each other and to the whole. This is what is meant by describing them as 'functional.' (Baudrillard, 1968, pg. 35)

The premise of this section is that subcultural expression and their products are infused and therefore structurally persist as an infused response to the culmination of the horrors of the past. The reaction and response of difference becomes manifested structurally through other avenues - political and economic policy, cultural products such as dance, painting and lyrics - which are utilized to reject each other. This is not to say that individual will and choice do not play their part in the construction of rap music, dance rituals and devastating policy, as clearly response manifests itself in different and explicit ways. In music, responses are experienced in varied and numerous ways, and the leaking of the

effects of policy through fissures created in mainstream culture have no ability to restrict actions but instead infuse whichever actions are chosen. All interactions with destabilizing policy and all interactions between cultural systems that collide with others tweak, knock off balance and reform social perceptions in either negative or positive ways. Lyrics of the rapper The Game comes to mind here:

> *Made my grandmother pray for good,*
> *And never made her happy, when I bet that new*
> *Mercedes could,*
> *Ain't no bars, but niggas can't escape the hood,*
> *They took so many of my niggas, that I should hate*
> *the hood*
> *But it's real niggas like me, that make the hood*
> *Ridin' slow in the Phantom just the way I should.*
> (The Game, 2008, track 5)

This stanza is another that caught me and echoed throughout and created a necessity that I understand what he meant by "just the way I should." Like other lyrics before it this stays with me long after the song's ending and like the others it was not until late in this line of thinking that a conclusion was manufactured. Looking to the concepts provided by Pierre Bourdieu of "habitus" and "corporealization" we can see that often our actions are guided by social milieus and driven by the intrinsic conceptualizations of social organization which are reformed relative to our experiences, locale and people around us. Constant and historical effects of our socialization are inescapable as they work to create

constructs and profiles of ways to act, schemas of conceptual mapping and understandings of social life. This works its way to our very core by driving and limiting the acts, the functions of social connectivity and the ways we dress, speak, and live. This shows that the network of conceptualizations of the world has an ever constant effect on the way we carry our bodies and our minds. Kraska, in a subculture study of militarism speaks to an explanation of the concept of "habitus":

> Bourdieu identifies some features of these dispositions that are germane for understanding the irony of enjoying militarism. First, the habitus is more than an unconnected conceptual framework from which to interpret the world. It imbues the physical body and becomes an unconscious part of how we carry ourselves, react to others, and employ language. The habitus actually "molds the body" and becomes second nature. Second, given that the habitus "reflects the social conditions within which it is acquired," a feature Bourdieu terms structured, social structure itself becomes corporealized within individuals. Third it would follow that these structured dispositions are also durable: "They are ingrained in the body in such a way that they endure through the life history of the individual, operating in a way that is

> pre-conscious and hence not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification. (Kraska, 1998, pg. 104)

He goes on to talk about the effects of habitus on his person:

> In light of my youthful experiences with militarism and its tools, Bourdieu's notion of corporealization of social structure helps explain the case with which I blended into and enjoyed paramilitarism, despite my academically attained disdain for such an orientation. I suspect that I even "carried myself" differently when interacting with my paramilitary peers not only to fit in but also to measure up to their warrior standards. (Kraska, 1998, pg. 105)

Understanding the essence of the lyrics themselves comes through an understanding of the play of agency. It is important to understand that institutionalized marginalization causes social injury to entire populations of people and works to, over years, create new schemas and networks of meanings and values. While the subculture itself often participates in the opposition and rejection of mainstream ideology, so too, are new sets of created meaning altered. The crux of the premise here is that all actions sprout from the structural injection of institutionalization, and that regardless of sub-genre all rap is a form of structural and conscious rejection; that lyrics of rap and hip-hop or the individual's eventual acceptance of mainstream values are explicit responses to

socio-political mainstream rejection; that value systems are often molded or reworked in rejection; and that gold chains, sagging pants, rap battles, and even acceptance of mainstream ideology are all definitive rejections of the rejecters and all ingrained structurally with deeply embedded cultural conflict.

Further that The Game's insistence to be "ridin' slow in the Phantom just the way I should," is representative of the lasting effects of infused social injury. When values are categorized between rejected and accepted they often come to be descriptors in terms of race, and succeeding at "white qualities" while maintaining authenticity to unconventional subcultural values becomes a remarkable achievement. Capital, and with it power and respect, is the value that is a game that both sides understand. With success as a constituted "white quality," dominant discourse demands that one must ascribe to certain values in order to succeed and it becomes the only necessary and solid evidence that legitimizes the demonization of rap and hip-hop. Of course, black and white American economic inequality is rooted much deeper than expressing oneself by writing vulgar or non-vulgar lyrics, or through tattoo art or not, or deciding whether to wear a belt or to sag your pants. Economic disparity deals with a structure long ago built as a disproportionate system, while wearing a belt is nothing more than a cultural, aesthetic choice; the two have only come to be connected as a modern social phenomenon.

For The Game, riding in an expensive car becomes representative of immense structural obstacles that are implicated through institutionalized racism, and highlights the rarity and importance of notions of success within black

American culture. "Riding slow" shows an appreciation and an achieved mark despite being categorized as a "morally corrupt vandal" or facing institutionally violent racism in policy. Simultaneously while ridiculing mainstream ideology and values, notions of black American success becomes symbolic of overcoming politically and socially constructed barriers; and black Americans contain an implicit and explicit understanding of this phenomenon which works its way into the word play of rhyming lyrical flows. By being separated from these mainstream values of capital and commerce the feelings of impoverishment and the constant harrowing of governmental policy creates a black culture that highly valorizes high-end commodified items and a subculture that becomes obsessed with obtaining serial commodification. In a most ironic turn, although rap and hip-hop cultures' fascination with capital and consumerism closely mimics mainstream ideology, the insistence to acquire high-end items becomes more evidence of their atavistic qualities; a subculture marked by their lack of common-sense and devoid of enough discipline to douse the urges of the market.

In short, it is argued that the musical cultural productions of subcultures cannot divorce themselves from the infused nuances of the layered context and that created lyrics in a rappers vision - regardless of intent, "keeping it real," or economic authenticity - becomes rested on the effects of leaking meanings. The construction of a subverted and demonized subculture is in its very essence a conclusion of a structural rejection made out of the exclusion principle which stretches through the years, through the functionality of cultures and through the

expressions of cultural products by communicating, in a most subtle and nuanced manner, *that all rap matters*.

Authenticity arguments of enterprises and empires of rap and hip-hop moguls like Jay-Z and Kanye West are legitimized by the influence they have over rap culture. Their image has the potential to create an influx of rappers that use their art and their words as a possible means to escape poverty scenarios and to make money in a subcultural way. They can infuse rising artists with "sell-out" notions which influences them to accept the dominant values of capital and its powerful structure, essentially accepting attempts of gentrification that the genre supposedly resists to its core. However, this is remitting to understandings of where rap is "being taken," refraining from understanding of where "its come from," its construct, and its essence. This leads us to an important part of understanding rap as Ogbar points us to:

> ...but this does not mean that celebrations of wealth do not appear. In fact, it is a dominant theme, but the cachet of being wealthy is indicated by implicit or explicit references that the wealth comes from illegitimate activities (Ogbar, 2007, pg. 26).

While mainstream ideology represents in its discourse and its moral crusades that having gangsta qualities and that accepting norms and values that differ from mainstream notions leads to depravation and failure, it is oppositely a point of emphasis that rappers and their subcultural values and norms possess the capability to foster successful business ventures and lives. A main value of rap

and hip-hop and recurring theme is an infatuation of capital and mainstream notions of "success." A capacity to conspicuously and defiantly uphold subcultural, rejected values while winning at mainstream games is a manifested rejection of traditional ideology and displays the lack of authenticity in the rumors of moral and literal bankruptcy that are purported to exist in conjuncture with rap culture. Success is a constant, blatant reminding symbol that the dirty secret of rap culture and the righteous secret of success are not held by mainstream moral crusaders; that no one holds the underlying truth of success and of ways to live and that constructed personalities and collective perceptions of different people are helpless against the "frames" circulated by the self-interested forces of society.

Frames of Society

Rituals of mainstream ideology are subject to powerful underlying themes of dominant hegemony, and nearly always, these messages are thematically represented to preserve some vein of self-interest. It is so easy for denizens of mainstream ideology to sneer and laugh at the "lost" people of differing subcultures, who are thought to employ such childish notions of sagging pants and who experience community by hanging out on street corners (Bageant, 2008). Traditional ideologues and media pundits question how people could be so bereft of common sense and so devoid of intrinsic rationale that somehow they lost out on their share of common sense intelligence. However, it is difficult

to explain why rituals of white mainstream America are so much better than the sagging pants, different clothing and speech of alternate cultures. It is difficult to understand why it is necessary to show that these subcultural practices are evidence of atavistic qualities within people who differ from mainstream culture. Most importantly, it is difficult to fully explain the psycho-social desire of mainstream culture to rank others beneath them and their incessant need to insist that others are inferior. There is a pervasive and undying urge to forge social lines of hostility and to separate oneself, if not distally than morally, from others. An endless cycle of "othering" and ranking which attempts to make us all the same, insisting that we should quickly appeal to the same values or risk being cast to the other side of the line which is constantly being re-etched in the sand.

Rhetoric of mainstream ideology often justifies dominant ways of life by claiming to base it on practical and rational approaches which will improve the quality of life and the common good. However, despite the mainstream rhetoric's' insistence on pragmatism, common-sense attitudes about criminal justice and culture are often based on traditional ideologies about personal choice and the American dream. This often leaves behind and sifts out practical versions of applicable solutions which would remove social and structural violence against minorities, would involve better cost-benefit ratios and would consist of a decrease in crime and prison warehousing.

If there is an unanticipated point that comes out of this it is that there is clearly a specter among us; a trait becoming ingrained rather than outright. A

division, internalizing lines of hostility, socially constructing separations that demand a refusal to accept and a fear of the non-compliance of difference. A structural, collective understanding that conceptualizes the world as a hostile and demarcated place; melting away and depleting the fundamental essences of community.

Cultural representations are experienced on the couch, behind the desk and in the words of online articles. With the bezel of monitors most literally forming the frame of existing knowledge structures, media outlets - constructed sources of knowledge - fastens our lives together helping people to construct how the world should be conceptualized, by creating mainstream ideas of groups of people and ways of the world, infused with individual self-interest and already internalized maps of existence. This helps frame our perceptions and manipulate our expectations, all the while, constructing universal truths that just cannot be escaped. Meanwhile, numbers and quantities of people behind a believed truth solidify it, ostensibly etching it in stone and deeming it non-amenable. Often one picture stands as the understanding of experience, events and culminating lives of an entire group of people, diminishing the wonders and pains of entire cultures to one representative picture.

In the book "Frames of War," author Judith Butler (2009) lends her writing to understanding the concept of framing violent war events:

> But if we are to ask whether this regulation of violence
> is itself also violent in some way, part of violence,
> then we need a more careful vocabulary to distinguish

> between the destruction of the bomb and the framing
> of its reality, even though, as we know, both happen
> at the same time, and the one cannot happen without
> the other.
> (Butler, 2009*,* pg. xiii)

She posits that the image elicited from a violent act creates two functions in reality. First, it asserts the idea that in actuality a violent act was committed, and secondly, it elicits a representation of the violent event. These images in actuality and which are chosen, frame the event into a singular moment cropping out the rest of the world, and in effect, cutting out the whirlwind of acts and consequences surrounding the act itself. The frame, in this sense, is a weakness within images that not only "exhibits reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality" (Butler, 2010, pg. xvii). Like *historicity,* framing works to manipulate and construct the perceptions of reality and society by reducing the scope of the picture, by cutting down conditions that erect environments and by removing external acts that create consequences. By whittling down temporal and spatial cues that give pertinent insight to culminating events the frame works to create an underlying and tacit perception of something, which reduces the complexities that are involved making entire events, people and cultures easy to understand and even easier to solve.

> This means that the frame is always throwing
> something away, always keeping something out,

> always de-realizing and de-legitimating alternative versions of reality, discarded negatives of the official version.
>
> (Butler, 2009, pg. xiii)

The limited representative images that circulate truths and universalities about people is hardly enough information to construct potentially intrusive and obstructive policies, yet it is often the most information people have about the scenes they never experience. These touted and ostensible truths create politicians who need votes to keep their political careers alive and their actions can manufacture consequences which exceed the boundaries of their predetermined paths. Further, this obstructive policy that mainstream America so readily gets behind, in its wake of destruction often inserts itself into the construct of these subcultures - altering and remaking them, asserting new ways of life and erecting new social issues that demand public panic. The point is that criminal justice is often mistakenly asserted as a common-man field, where anyone can be an expert and apply themes of justice based on little more than singular representations of entire sectors of society. Yet, academics and scholars lend their lives to studying and delineating fully realized pictures of different groups of people with maddeningly complex conditions, requirements and existences which extend far beyond the frames of life and the numbers of statistics which attempt to stuff complex sociality into easily understood and conformed categories. Bogazianos (2012) addresses this "common sense" attitude:

> It is a condition in which the public has grown increasingly confident and vocal about its own criminological expertise, relying primarily on "commonsense" beliefs about why criminals do what they do, what law enforcement officials should do about them, and how long they should be locked up for, regardless of what other experts - professional criminologists, mainstream and critical - have to say about it all. (Bogazianos, 2012, pg. 9)

It needs to be re-examined that "commonsense beliefs" about criminal justice and its policy often seem to be the moral and practical decision. However, this commonsense rationale is often seized because of the ease of expressing the attitude and this can have both gargantuan and insidious consequences for countless individuals that have no consent in the devastating nature of intrusive policy, and who rarely feel the benefits of "common-good" initiatives.

Understandings of implementing criminal justice policy requires contextual, subtle and nuanced visions of the complexities of human lives that, so often, escape commonsense rationales and slip through the fingers of statistical and practical reasoning's based on simple "frames" of life. Indeed, if "ways of life" are, in fact, interconnecting webs of existence, then surely, they are owed more than oversimplified and commonsense observations from a distal perspective that only offer solutions that in effect, are most evidently bereft of

proximity to those who create it - and most assertively, full of predisposed notions.

Chapter 5

Auto-Ethnographical Conclusion

The origins of this project came before the reading of the literature and an academic career, but began when listening to the musical cultural products of rap and hip-hop years ago. Lyrics that stuck with me became heavily symbolic by exceeding the meaning of individual words and providing resonating correlations with my own introspective self. Within some lyrics I saw reflections of myself and sometimes I saw reflections of others.

It became very clear that more than representations of the surrounding world were contained in those lyrics, but they also involved the strangled frustrations of cultural existences, structured power imbalances and discourse created in the events of history. Obviously, there was something evident within the essence of rap and hip-hop music that, perhaps is part of other musical genres too, yet much more distinct in this genres' lyrical stanzas. Other authors called this distinct factor the "oppositional trait" (Bogazianos, 2012; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994).

Inspiration for lyrical writing is repeatedly thought to be within an individuated vein of the creative process, yet the discourse used to construct lyrics is formed and limited based on locale and social engagements. In some sense then, words themselves contain the past experiences of a culture and the social wins and losses of history. The potential way words are formulated and

used is maintained by the events of the past and is constantly reformed by events still coming. In a very literal capacity, lyrical flows contain a world of experiences, engagements and rejections as they sprout from the historical perspectives of a population that has been politically and structurally rejected. The cultural products of such a historically-bounded rejection come to represent the latent effects of potent government policy. As political processes unfairly provide policy that labels minorities as criminals, laws and repercussions fracture society creating splintered sectors of dejected individuals who reject mainstream society back. This individually conscious experience of dejection and the packaged experience of structural rejection constructs a society that is fragmented and focused on differences, as opposed to concentrating on the boundless similarities which outweigh them.

The lyrical flows that mainstream society fears and dislikes are formed by rejection and into new forms of rejection of mainstream values and ideas. Spurring a use of the criminal justice and prison systems, more stringent laws and repercussions are waged against minorities who accept and proliferate their differences. With great power and enforcement - from the media and the criminal justice system - minority individuals have their morality and integrity questioned, they are assumed to be criminal as opposed to requiring aid and they simultaneously experience oppressive long-lasting policies; and perhaps, for those who retain nothing more than small illusions of political power, creating and listening to those lyrical flows remains, most defiantly, their response.

"Liberty Needs Glasses"

A core argument of this thesis has been that the displayed agency of black Americans - whether they become rap artists, accept white dominant ideology or anything in between - sprouts from the structures of history and the sustained effects of oppression and marginalization; and, further, that implemented quick-fix policies are often palliative. Without a more complex cultural and social understanding policies often fail, and leave behind in their wake devastating consequences for the future. This thesis offers rap culture as a long-term consequence of destructive policy, suggesting that there are underlying structural reasons that rap maintains intrinsic oppositional qualities and why it seeks to differentiate itself through different methods of music creation by utilizing differing beats, sounds, and rules than mainstream music. In a sense, rejection lies in the very essence of the music, not simply in its words but in its structure, its presentation and its perpetuation.

In this writing, rap music and lyrical flows are used as vehicles to represent the potency of the sprouting effect from structure, the power of the implementation of meaning into cultural products and the lasting effects of profoundly marginalizing mechanisms of government and criminal justice. While cultural products can be easily highlighted to show evidence of the infused and lasting effects of institutionalized racism in policy, there are other practical and material ways that they manifest themselves. Lyrics often point to many forms of oppression present in mainstream institutions, featuring police harassment,

racially disproportionate and mass incarceration, police brutality, racial profiling, drug laws, and so on.

Mass incarceration and the disproportionate representation of black Americans in prisons, is perhaps, the most revealing practical consequence of misinformed and destructive policy. The instillation of prison life for black American communities has become so prominent that it is projected that "an estimated 32% of American Black males will be imprisoned in their lifetime" (Nisker, 2007, p.179). Since the 1990's the United States has maintained the highest rate of incarceration of all industrialized countries and throughout this time the United States sustained an incarceration rate that was six to twelve times higher than any industrialized nation in the European Union (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Wacquant, 2009). The number of drug offenders who were admitted to the prison population increased fivefold between the years of 1984 and 1998 (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Gainsborough & Mauer, 2000). With estimates of housing offenders within the prison system ranging between 25,000 and 35,000 dollars per year, the financial damage that the War on Drugs has demanded is devastating (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009).

While it is easy to see the massive financial devastation of uninformed policy, the social devastation and latent effects are still largely unknown until they rear their heads in the future. Despite crime rates steadily declining over the last four decades and the War on Drugs largely failing, the position of the "get tough on crime" and "clean up the streets" discourse is still prominent in political debates and media coverage of crime. The political process demands that

politicians push for high conviction rates on crimes and that they improve quality of life by using the criminal justice system, which is ill-equipped to handle social issues. In order to assuage concerns of criminality for the general public, politicians create laws that crack down on inner cities and poor minorities while the act of filling empty beds of prison cells is used as evidence to prove that getting tougher on crime is working. Bogazianos (2012, p.141) echoes this sentiment:

> Despite conviction and incarceration rates in the seventy-plus percentiles, the criminal justice system is continually portrayed as "soft" in this or that crime by advocates across the political spectrum, with seriously damaging - and often unintended - results.

The most disconcerting piece is that the ideological premises and misinformed policies behind the drastic rise in prison populations continues to dominate. The criminalization of the black American minority is being re-conceptualized to fit immigration and any alien that is capable of being "other-ed." In fact, Bogazianos (2012, p.145) offers startling information about the sharp rise in immigration incarceration: "..a concentration on immigration offenses, which accounted for just 12 percent of federal sentences in 1996 but now constitute 32 percent, nearly triple the 1996 number. And, since almost 90 percent of those sentenced under federal immigration laws are Hispanic, Latinos now account for 40 percent of everyone sentenced at the federal level, over three times their proportion of the general population."

However, the trepidation should transcend an understanding of what historical policy has done thus far, as it is yet to be seen what the effects of mass incarceration will really be, or the effects of creating "prisonized" populations, or implementing policy - such as the War on Drugs - which seeks its way into the lives of poor and minority subcultural existences and rips them apart. In accordance to the quick-fix policies that were implemented to assuage moral panics in mainstream society, the consequences of policies will have effects that ripple into the future. While rap and hip-hop may very well be an effect of previous policy implementation and a consequence of the way we force others to live, likewise, current institutional effects may spawn new cultural lives, which seem even more alien and more opposed to mainstream ideology than the harsh beats and vulgar lyrical flows of rap and hip-hop.

More appropriately, as already presented, the harsh beats and vulgar lyrical flows may be as much a function of the rejection of mainstream culture as the actual social and political messages that are being purported. Outright harmful and oppressive policy may work to establish a necessity to seek separate social identity, lending itself to the garnering of oppositional tendencies and constructed rejections of mainstream qualities. In a sense, constructing social identity that differs from mainstream values may be the returned rejection. Rejection of the rejecters in this sense, may work to propagate the culture while concurrently propagating the disdain for the culture, all the while, sprouting from deeply embedded societal power imbalances.

Regardless, the possible calamitous cultural consequences of policy creates structurally and outright institutionalized marginalization that pits one culture against another, and which implicates failure for commonly purported and assumed to be widespread American values such as liberty and justice.

Reflexivity and Questions

This thesis implies accusations on the general public and the government officials who construct policy. Further, it implies indictments on the previously established truths and universalities of mainstream knowledge which are pushed forward by moral entrepreneurs who clutch to misunderstood statistics and antiquated ideologies in the name of self-interested crusades. Most importantly it implicates, quite reflectively, the process of contriving knowledge structures by acknowledging that how we question is as equally important as how we answer. By acknowledging that concepts of our social selves construct lenses that limit our field of vision and our ideological landscape, we admit that the things we create are imprinted, restrained and strangled, within the images of ourselves. Cultural products, policies, questions and answers are all created through the lenses of our own self-image, and in this sense they are all limited by a failure to examine and question ourselves in a reflexive manner.

The very essence of this project comes from an understanding of structure and agency at play for rap and hip-hop artists. Positing that rap and hip-hop products are never devoid of the historical structure that drives them, and in a

reflexive sense it is possible that rejecting and rejecter are pieces of all of us, directing our social perceptions and molding how we believe people see us; and in turn, carving the concept of who we are as social beings. Black oppression works as an easy and visible vehicle to present this rejection, but it is wholly plausible that this rejection works its way into all of us helping to form our social personalities. It is entirely possible that my own academic predilections and scholarly work is evidence of rejection as a part of my person; a response to the perceived oppressions of my time. As the structure of oppression and marginalization infiltrate the social identities of rap artists, and their work exemplifies an imprint of their conscious and structural selves, so too may the scholarly work of academics or the policy proposals of government officials deeply reflect their social experiences and reflections which forms their agency.

Quickly, I would like to return to a quote used previously in this thesis by Jock Young:

> But the tensions between ideals and reality exist only because of the general and manifest awareness of them. Both the punitive anger of the righteous and the burning resentment of the excluded occur because the demarcation lines are blurred, because values are shared and space is transfixed, because the same contradictions of reward and ontology exist throughout society, because the souls of those inside and those outside the 'contented minority' are far from dissimilar, sharing the same desires and passions,

> and suffering the same frustrations, because there is no security of place nor certainty of being, and because differences are not essences but mere intonations of the minor scales of diversity. (Young, 2003, p.398-99)

Indicating that there is a part of oppressions which are relative and perceived, Young (2003) shows us that the acute awareness of existing marginalization and social borders is what makes them reflect back onto their oppressed. Oppressions as a relative and perceived concept exist everywhere and all the time, and as we fight the biggest oppressions of our lives or the numerous tiny battles throughout the day they never relent in working to forge the concepts of who we are. Always constructing, silently and structurally, consciously and in plain sight, to form the social self.

And that exemplifies the very basis and nature of this writing. That when I looked at rap lyrics worlds were opened up. When I looked at the lyrics I saw more than recurring themes, but the essences and complexities of rejected existences and cultural lives, where both are deeply intertwined, never easily separated, and riddled with experiences that make their way into meaningful lyrical stanzas; a byproduct of little more than my own recognition of underlying similarities and introspective connections. That the essence of our cultural lives and the products that come from them are imprinted with reflections of our own beliefs and desires, which fuels our relentless insistence and pursuance to reform them in our own image. As scholars, writers, academics, political pundits, researchers, and even hip-hop artists, there is no such thing as being divorced

from our products and that the messages we relay, the methods we use and the format of the writing are all evident of our losses and our pains, instilled perceptions and conceptions, and our sustained achievements and debilitating rejections.

Misinformed, quick-fix solutions, that are spawned from fear or disdain for difference, and are practically presented in policy proposals are real life representations of a failure to be reflexive, exemplifying a reluctance to question and examine any truth that has been previously established and a failure to acquire more deeply nuanced explanations of social and cultural existences. The myopic interpretations of subcultural lives and practices continues to stand strong, and antiquated knowledge structures of criminality and criminal justice response relentlessly plague stratagems to increase security and safety. Most distinctively, a failure to question previously established answers to old problems and an omission of questioning oneself in a reflexive manner, perpetuates countless social harms and injuries in the course of the expanding events and actions of the criminal justice system. As has been seen thus far, a refusal to question has resulted in compounded cultural, social and economic effects that have ruined the lives of individuals and the identities of populations.

A reflexive approach to writing and constructing policy, in tandem with the academic arena, could be effective by reflecting the basic and fundamental assumptions of certain political and social lenses into the limelight. Creating, in effect, undeniable admission that antiquated cultural concepts need to be updated, as policies and answers to social and cultural problems are only as

effective as the contextual understanding that underlies them. Constantly reviewing, reexamining and asking old questions leads to better understandings of people and better ways of life, and establishing new questions leads to new and informed answers which can attempt to avoid the vociferous effects of latent consequences whose waves crash, violently yet silently, onto the shores of the future.

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