BLACK NATIONALISM AND RAP MUSIC

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> To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves. . . . In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called for the freeing, the progress, and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of all suffering humanity.
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> *Sekou Toure*[1]

In this article, I examine some major nationalist trends in rap music (or hip-hop), its development and the implications of its future growth. I argue that rappers should return to the nationalistic focus of hip-hop if the industry is to become a base for African centered politico-economic and cultural development. This Afrocentric rendering could help promote a national culture to replace the popular (faddish) culture of violence and sexism and both wed African Americans to the best in their culture and allow them to more directly profit from their cultural product.

Additionally the promotion of Afrocentric national culture may help to create a standard of behavior and a new rites of passage away from guns, dope, sexism, and violence, and toward more African-centered definitions of manhood and womanhood rooted in righteous behavior, support for liberation struggles and political prisoners, Afrocentric community building, and good entertainment. Asante (1993, p. 124) maintains that "it is only a centeredness

JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES, Vol. 26 No. 3, January 1996 308-339

born of knowledge of our history and consciousness of our predicament that will lead us out of the abyss of violence."

Further, rap must be insulated from White supremacist criticism from outside the community. Euro-Americans can not stand as the moral authority in this country—their hands are too bloody. The moral vanguard of this country has always been the Black, Brown, and Red communities. However, too many in the Black community, their White supremacism intact, simply parrot the Euro-American condemnation of hip-hop. This is baseless, and is reminiscent of the facile criticism of be-bop. This group of White supremacists in Black face simply wait for White sanction of culture before giving their seal of approval. They admonish, inter alia, that rap music *causes* violence. That makes about as much sense as arguing that "Love Child" by the Supremes caused teen pregnancy. These senseless assertions are not pursued in this article.

The larger point is that the reality of the baselessness of these condemnations does not absolve African Americans, especially Black nationalists from criticizing hip-hop. Karenga (1993) reminds us that rap music does not have a martyrs immunity against criticism. However, we do not condemn hip-hop, but we challenge it to rise to the level of the best of its potential. I argue that its nationalistic focus points the direction toward, and encompasses, the best of this potential, which is the fusion of Black popular and national culture.

THE ORIGINS OF HIP-HOP

Rap music has had a profound impact on the African American community in the United States. Its greatest significance, to my mind, derives from the fact that it has fostered a profound nationalism in the youth of Black America. Arguably, hip-hop has become a conduit for African American culture to a greater extent than even jazz. Where the latter could, through its polyrhythmic syncopations, embrace both the nuances and jagged edges of the collective Black experience, it could not self-consciously energize the nationalist ethos in quite the way the more lyrically focused hip-hop does. To present these jagged edges, jazz, or be-bop, needed the uncompro-

mising lyric of the poet. Also, poets, with their jagged edges intact, still required the talking drum of instrumentation to fully capture the Black ethos of struggle, resistance, righteousness, exploitation, and creativity in Black America. Hip-hop fused the two—poetry and jazz—in such a way as to render itself the most conductive source of the current of African American culture.

Hip-hop, or rap music, began in the early 1970s. The first synthesis of self-conscious poetry and music can be traced, most directly, to the Black nationalist Last Poets. Their albums *The Last Poets*, *Chastisement*, *This is Madness*, and others have become classics in the African American community. When one member who separated from the group, with the stage name "Lightning Rod," used a musical score provided by Kool & The Gang as a backdrop to his lyrical narrative of a day in the life of two hustlers, he had no idea he was laying the basis for an entirely new musical genre. This album, *Hustler's Convention*, was a mainstay in the album collection of a South Bronx DJ named Kool Herc. Almost to a person, it is agreed that hip-hop began with Kool Herc.

Herc credited Lightning Rod and James Brown with providing the foundation for hip-hop, but it was Herc who gave it life. Herc was deft at the early art of mixing and fading one record into the next without missing a beat in the interchange. He did this mostly by ear. His vast repertoire of music, including some reggae beats that though loved in the streets were very hard to find, and his thundering speaker system known as "The Herculords" made his music highly danceable, rhythmical, and unavoidable. The thundering sounds of the Herculords remains legendary.

Meanwhile, an electronic genius of a young man, J. Saddler, had developed a more accurate way of mixing music from two turntables. Grand Master Flash, as he became known, originated the "clock method," whereby DJs used the face of the album as a sort of reckoning tool by which one could remember one's place on a record more exactly. This was necessary because Flash would not simply "mix" the records, but he would "scratch" them: using the needle in the groove as an instrument to make the grating though rhythmical sound for which rap has become famous. Although a hip-hop prodigy, Grand Wizard Theodore, reportedly discovered

this technique while under Flash's tutelage, it was Flash who perfected it. Flash is credited with giving hip-hop its face—the deft, smooth, and creative DJ. The battles between Flash and Herc became legendary. But even Herc would have to admit that none were faster than the original "Grand Master."

The face of rap in its early days was definitely the DJ. The body of rap was the urban wasteland that was the South Bronx. Here gangs of New York youth were encased in what could only be described as a war zone. After the Black power movement, the Vietnam War, and the FBI COINTELPRO against positive Black community organization, the gangs were almost alone as the one institution in the Black community offering a cogent message to Black youth. That message was, "Join and survive." The largest of these New York Black gangs was the Black Spades, and its youthful leader would rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the South Bronx. He transformed the Black Spades into the Zulu Nation, and he transformed himself into a hip-hop legend: Afrika Bambataa. With the coming of Bambataa the mind of hip-hop was turned to Black nationalism, positive creativity, vision, and healing. Some of his messages would not take root until as late as 1981 when his early rival, Flash, convinced his MC Melle Mel to coauthor "The Message," the first nationally recognized "progressive" rap statement on the condition of Black America.

HIP HOP AS A CONDUIT FOR POLITICAL CULTURE

Hip-hop is much more than the names and faces of individual practitioners of the genre. Inter alia, it has the potential to fill a transitional void of cross-generational cultural transmission within Black culture by providing a new lyric to an old tune, in some cases literally. When Public Enemy dropped "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos," they were not only providing an anthem for incarcerated Black youth, but they were doing so in the context of regurgitating "Hyperbolicsyllabicsesquedaelamistic," a 1970s Isaac Hayes tune from the album *Hot Buttered Soul*. It is the sampling aspect of

hip-hop that allows for creative synthesis in the context of cross-generational cultural transmission. Not only was this tying together of generations important in the aesthetic sense, but it was more significant because the nexus was established between a relatively apolitical generation of the 1970s and 1980s with the staunch Black nationalist African American subculture of the 1960s. Kool Herc made the most of this potential in hip-hop for cross-generational cultural transmission. In one sense, this was epitomized through his early use of James Brown ("Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud"), the Black nationalist Last Poets, and Rastafarian reggae. Reggae, especially in the hands of Bob Marley, picked up the nationalist torch laid down with the death of jazz great John Coltrane. Black nationalism was incubated in reggae before the coming of hip-hop, and to this day the best of reggae maintains its Garveyite elements.

Because the early era of hip-hop (1973-1979) was dominated by the DJ, the spun records had to speak for themselves. DJs like Herc and later Hollywood, just threw some catchy phrases over the mix; however, there wasn't much to the actual "rap" element of hip-hop. Melle Mel, Grandmaster Caz, The Treacherous Three, Lovebug Starski, and Hollywood were important progenitors of the era of MC dominance in hip-hop. MCs demonstrated their verbal acrobatics over "def" DJ mixes. This was epitomized in "Rapper's Delight," the Sugarhill Gang's expropriation of some of Grandmaster Caz's old raps, which nonetheless made rap a national phenomenon. The phrasing was classic hip-hop, but simplistic. Within 2 years, Melle Mel let the world know that living could sometimes be "like a jungle." This was "The Message." Although it was different from the hip-hop then in vogue, it evoked the nationalist roots of rap better than anything before—or since. It was cutting edge. It was in the best tradition of what KRS-ONE would later describe as "edutainment," but it was not as pretentious as the latter. This brand of nationalism was rooted in the commonality of oppression, and "The Message" made it plain. Later rap artists like Public Enemy and X-Clan would attempt to provide a more explicitly political and cultural analysis of the Black condition without compromising the basic hip-hop aspects of their raps.

THREE FOCI OF NATIONALISM

Karenga (1980, p. 15) defines Black nationalism as the political belief and practice of African Americans as a distinct people with a distinct historical personality who politically should develop structures to define, defend, and develop the interests of Blacks as a people. This entails a redefinition of reality in Black images and interests, providing a social corrective by building institutional and organizational structures that house Black aspirations, and it provides a collective vocation of nation building among Black people as a political end. Beyond Karenga's definition lies the issue of the motivation, or justification, for the emergence of Black nationalism within the African American community. There appear to be three such justifications for the emergence of Black nationalism.

First is that brand of nationalism that emerges from identification rooted in a perceived commonality of oppression. Another emerges from a recognition of a convergence of political purpose, objectives, and goals. Third is that brand of nationalism that rests on the justification of a commonality of culture. The first type, though superficially based, can be quite lasting. In the Black community it rests on the recognition of the common caste identity of Blacks in White supremacist America. In its vulgar, though popular, aspect, it promotes a form of skin color nationalism that disregards the diversity within the Black community especially around issues of class, gender, and cultural identification. In this sense, it is inherently reactive, rooted in the specious Eurocentric concept of race under which the very people who promote this brand of nationalism have been relegated.

In the second variant, nationalism emerges from a common agenda. This form is usually representative of a more sophisticated analysis beyond purely skin color considerations. However, what actually emerges is a collective agenda among those filtered into the process by skin color considerations. Here where Black skin is viewed as necessary, though not sufficient, a type of interest group focus or specialization occurs where the nationalist group orients itself around a particular ideology and political program and offers itself as an appropriate vehicle for the realization of Black aspira-

tions. There is a wide continuum ranging from the Black nationalist conservatism of Washington through the bourgeois nationalism of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to the revolutionary Black nationalism of the Republic of New Afrika (RNA).

In the last case, where nationalism emerges from culture considerations, the reactive and purely skin color considerations are bypassed. Nationalism that emerges from a cultural perspective takes on self-defining aspects of the culture group itself and does not derive from reactive definitions. Because culture is an inclusive concept, it incorporates gender, class, and other diverse components of society within its construct. It does not rely on the Eurocentric concept of race; however, it realizes that people of a common African culture in this society are also primarily those we consider Black people. Also, this nationalism suggests that whereas African Americans constitute a distinguishable culture group—a people—then that people should have a common agenda because, historically, people have developed as groups and, presently, African Americans have been subjugated as a group into a caste in the United States. Notice here that though a commonality of oppression is recognized in this approach, it is not the primary justification for this, an African-centered nationalism. Only this justification leads to the synthesis of nationalist thought and practice suggested by Karenga's (1993) definition of Black nationalism. Much of the early nationalism in hip-hop had as its justification a commonality of oppression. There later emerged a nationalism based in the second type: a commonality of interests and agenda. It was only later, especially with the rise of X-Clan that the third type began to develop.

It is clear that nationalism, whatever its justification, has, inter alia, political, cultural, psychic, and economic elements. Rappers began to articulate all these perspectives in their music. Entertainment was the raison d'être, but entertainment could be couched in nationalism and could become Afrocentric and transformative. Asante (1987) asserted the connection between Black aesthetics, from orature to dance, and Afrocentrism. This Afrocentrism could then infuse the best image and interests of Black peoples into the

popular culture and allow it to fuse into a liberating national culture.[2] This was the central focus of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s.[3] The potential for the development of such a liberating process was all the more important because hip-hop up to the time of Run DMC's "King of Rock" was strictly playing to a Black audience. Of course all hip-hop was not nationalistic, or even political, for that matter. Many rap artists were as apolitical as their counterparts in mainstream music. I would argue, however, that from its inception the nationalist ethos has been present in hip-hop. In fact, this Black nationalism has structured hip-hop in the past and continues to do so. It is important that we understand how and why this has occurred.

A NATIONALIST CONDUIT: THE ZULU NATION

Nationalism in hip-hop does not emerge exclusively from the lyrics of early rap music. In the early days of hip-hop in the 1970s, this nationalism developed from the collective ethos of the Black community that spawned this new genre. In this respect, the very framework of the hip-hop community suggested, fostered, and allowed to flourish a collectivist nationalist praxis. This is because hip-hop was incubated in the Black community's house parties, public parks, housing projects, and local jams. These sites in the Black community were often under the immediate influence of the dominant territorial gangs in the areas. The gangs made security a chief concern for both would-be rappers and those coming to jams. For their own benefit, gangs could insure the safe conduct of a party, at some cost, functioning as traditional security. In this some gangs could find their own commercial success.

The presence of gangs also motivated performers to enlist their own crews for security, especially when they performed outside of their own home base, because much of the hip-hop scene was done through house parties.[4] One such famous crew provided security for Grand Master Flash. The Cassanova Crew, as they were called, had a reputation; according to Grandmaster Caz: "They were kicking nigger's asses."[5]

The movement into different territories also facilitated the spread of hip-hop.[6] This process also moved gangs into more commercial and less territorial postures as the prospect for wealth beyond nickel and diming over turf presented itself in the form of commercial security enterprises. It also suggested the transformation of crews and gangs in a manner that would reflect the collective ethos that hip-hop, even with its famous "battles," nonetheless promoted.[7] This suggested a linkage around commonality instead of differences. The most obvious commonality within the emergent hip-hop community was the fact that it was exclusively Black. Any commonality that emerged would have to emerge within that context. The result was a reaffirmation of the basic aspects of Black cultural nationalism framed in the context and aspirations of a young gifted and Black core of hip-hop talent. This was the Zulu Nation.

Zulu is really a youthful expression of cultural unity. As such it does not go in and out of style. People may be down with particular crews or not, but the unity associated with the cultural aspects of hip-hop operate independently of folks being down with this crew or not. Caz captures this notion when he points out that "it's [Zulu's] not a record, and it's not something that gets hot and not hot. You might be up on it now and not hear about it later, *but to people that's down it's always there*" (Eure & Spady, 1991, p. xv). Zulu brought cultural focus to the hip-hop community because its chief leader was himself among the earliest sources of hip-hop: Afrika Bambataa. Although Bambataa had emerged from the Black Spades, one of the largest Black gangs in New York, the ethos that he brought forth was inclusive. In response to the question, "Did Zulu play a part in bringing about the unity [in hip-hop]?" Grandmaster Caz responded:

> Definitely, because Bambataa . . . everybody was down with Zulu, even if you wasn't down with the crew, even if you wasn't down with [Afrika] Islam and the Funk Machine, and Bambataa and the Soulsonic Force, you was still down with Zulu. You was down with Bam, you know what I'm saying. So that came from everybody just being down with Bam. None of that shit was happening when Bam was around, it was a respect kind of thing. Like down at the Roxy, that was Bam's shit. I mean, Bam was the first major person

> talking about unity, or people being together. (Eure & Spady, 1991, pp. xiv-xv)

Bambaata had an organization, a legacy as one of the early progenitors of hip-hop, and when he and his group, the Soul Sonic Force, in 1982 scored a major hit record with "Planet Rock," the Zulu ethos began to inundate hip-hop nationally.

NATIONALISM AND THE NATIONALIZING OF HIP-HOP'S APPEAL: RUN DMC

The nationalist ethos that was evident in the music of Flash and Bambataa did not dominate hip-hop. The young genre drew even more on the diverse aspects of the creative community that had spawned it. It was not until the middle 1980s that mega rap stars Run DMC made an overtly Black nationalist statement in rap form with the release of "I'm Proud to Be Black." Interestingly this recording appeared on an album, *Raising Hell*, where the rappers performed with White rockers, Aerosmith, in a rap and roll version of the rock group's "Walk This Way." What had occurred in the interim is that hip-hop began to more overtly incorporate the flavor of New Wave, Techno, and House music. Hip-hop had always relied on R&B, jazz, funk, reggae, and rock samples. But not before Run DMC did hip-hop have both a national White audience and a hard rock sampling face. Run DMC did not begin this way. They, guided by the managerial and marketing genius of Russell Simmons, parlayed the B-boy image of hip-hop into million-dollar record sales. Their nihilistic reflections on the hardship of ghetto life captured the ethos of urban Black youth. Their hit, "It's Like That," became an anthem of Black youth, so much of which was isolated in the inner cities. Isolated from the more bourgeois elements of emerging Black suburbia as well as the Black middle class whose aspirations were more consistent with the roles found in the Cosby Show and the mood captured later in Bobby McFerrin's, "Don't Worry Be Happy," DMC's message reflected and legitimized the B-boy lifestyle, and the Fresh Fest tours that they headlined showed

major labels as well as the entire country that hip-hop was and would remain a powerful force in music.

Run DMC's hard edge rap was coupled with guitar riffs that would put the best rock guitarists to shame. But coupled with the uncompromising bass and talking drum of the R&B and funk traditions, this made for an incredibly rhythmical bouncing B-boy style. This wasn't Led Zeppelin. It was more like Cream meets P-funk meets the Last Poets, with as much of a mixture of frivolity, humor, fantasy, and conscience. But at the stage of "King of Rock," it appeared that hip-hop was playing to a Black (and increasingly Hispanic) audience while beginning to attract Whites. It was not, however, self-consciously crossing over to insure White appeal. That appeared to be, at best, secondary. However, with the unheard of commercial success of "King of Rock," the crossover appeal was so great that Run DMC appeared to cross over and out of the mainstream of hip-hop (African American), and they have never really been accepted back, on a national level, by their previously loyal Black rap fans.[8]

THE GERMINATING CONTEXT FOR A MORE FOCUSED NATIONALISM

If we move beyond hip-hop's spatial locus (urban centers beginning in New York) and turn to its temporal locus, we begin to understand better it's wedding to Black nationalism. The national emergence of hip-hop is contemporaneous with the rise of reactionary republicanism in the Reagan-Bush years that would persist for no less than 12 years. The multiple recessions of the late 1970s and early 1980s were depressionary for Black people and especially Black youth. From 1979 to 1981, the Black community of the United States was transfixed on the Atlanta Child Murders, and few were convinced or assuaged by the conviction of Wayne Williams. In the late 1970s, Louis Farrakhan split with Warith Deen Muhammad's American Muslim Mission and reformed the Nation of Islam (NOI) under the former Black supremacist concepts abandoned by

the son of Elijah Muhammad with the death of the self-proclaimed "messenger of Allah" in 1975. Coupled with the rise of the Farrakhan led NOI was the political rise of Jesse Jackson and his presidential runs in 1984 and 1988. Although Jackson has never espoused nationalism beyond its expediency for realizing his integrationist aims, the attacks on Jackson by the White media and his White coaspirants served to galvanize Black nationalist support around him and to result in positive sentiment for his campaign even among those who did not support his populist platform.

When Jackson received the NOI's Fruit of Islam as his own security force, the convergence of the integrationist and nationalist hearkened back to the days of King and Malcolm. At this volatile point, only hip-hop spoke to the times (with the constant exception of Gil-Scott Heron). In these times, hip-hop's sociopolitical consciousness was bared proudly for all suckers to see. Hip-hop spoke to the realities, perceptions, misperceptions, and aspirations that for too long lay stillborn on ghetto streets or aborted by conditions that waylaid hopes that even in death found no audience outside of the tenement walls or the unmarked boundaries that separated where you could go in the city and where the sun bet not set on you. George (1988) observes that in his lyrics,

> Melle Mel could praise Jesse Jackson's run for the presidency ("Jesse") while mainstream Black acts avoided singing about this historic event, make allusions to Hitler in discussing America's attitude toward the poor ("Beat Street Breakdown"), and anticipate by several years the antidrug movement of the mid-eighties ("White Lines"). (p. 193)

Unfortunately, nationalism also took the patriarchal focus of the 1960s and took a very misogynist approach to Black womanhood. Although from its earliest days hip-hop has had its female DJs and MCs, its center stage was mainly male oriented. By the time of the rise of Sugarhill, acts like Angie B began to emerge through the hip-hop ranks. For the most part, females would perform ancillary roles as dancers, and they were relegated, as performers, to novelty raps such as in the case of the Real Roxanne or to response raps

such as those by Shante. The true marketing and recording potential of female acts was unheralded until the monumental success of Salt n Pepa's "Push It." Beyond representation, from a womanist perspective, what was as bad was and is the continued objectification of Black women as bitches and hoes or other types of property, as male rappers pursue White supremacist patriarchal visions of Stagolee. This is epitomized in the straight up B-boy lines of LL Cool J as well as in most of the gangsta rap from early Boogie Down Productions (BDP), Ice-T, NWA, The Geto Boys, Treach, Tupac, and less successful would-be gangstas up to the pimp daddy mack appeals of Too Short and his aspirants. Undoubtedly the most notorious acts in this vein have emerged from the stables of Luke Productions.

But nationalism doesn't survive simply on the articulation of sentiment. It must be wedded to at least two other elements: image and organization. To a large extent, Russell Simmons provided an organizational basis for Black acts through his Def Jam Productions and Rush Management. But Simmons as a businessman, along with Rick Rubin, saw the potential of White acts as well as Black. In fact he produced the first White rap group with national appeal, The Beastie Boys. Interestingly he signed and produced this White group although it would be more than 5 years before he would sign a Black female rap act (Nikki D). So the nationalism that Simmons's activities engendered were more incidental to his overall aim of moving rap music into the mainstream of national and international markets in terms of volume sold. However, he provided an organizational focus for rap's Black business interests. The emergent independent Black rap labels found it difficult to compete with the hegemonic budgets of the major labels, and many were bought out or opted to hook up with the majors. Although the majors were late in seeing the commercial potential of hip-hop, they nonetheless developed hip-hop arms within their organizations to sop up the emergent talent. Under these influences, rap moved away from the call response pairs epitomized by RUN DMC, incorporating live bands, and huge MC Hammer stage shows.

Now the image of hip-hop has gone on to encompass much of the older elements but now includes the consummate producers of

hip-hop who have fused the best of the genre with more traditional elements of Black music. These include but are not limited to Dr. Dre and funk, Pete Rock and jazz, the Bomb Squad and rock and R & B, and so on. The central point is that the image of hip-hop has been transformed to include rap's super producers and promoters, rap movie and television stars, raptivists, emergent Black womanist artists, respected Mexican and Caribbean American artists like Kid Frost, The Latin Alliance, and Cypress Hill, "suckerducktricktype-wannabe" acts like Serch, House of Pain, Marky Mark, Vanilla Ice, as well as new geographic entrepôts in the West, South, and Midwest.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE IMAGE OF HIP-HOP: BDP

The image of hip-hop was largely the B-boy and Fly Girl images of urban Black youth. These images were perpetuated in the burgeoning music video industry. Getting paid, drinking forties, rolling, stupid sex, beepers, fly gear, a dope sound system in the helluva ride—all were part of the impulse and imitation that continued to move Black youth that flocked to hip-hop in droves. This was the image of hip-hop. But the reality included much of the postteen Black audience that was turned off by the pretensions of R&B and less inspired nouveau techno jazz of the Wynton Marsalis ilk. For them, hip-hop continued the best of the funk and soul traditions that disco failed to project beyond the dance halls and cabarets. The hip-hop sampling, the danceable beats, and the infectious rhymes made rap attractive, but the substantive content—its focus on gangs, drugs, community involvement, and giving something back—hit a nerve for postteens emerging from one type of disillusionment in the teen years and facing a new kind in the 20s and the decreased prospects for success, not just on an individual level, but as a people. For them, the image of hip-hop was not epitomized in the B-boy image so much as it was epitomized in the community interest. As the White media and its Black surrogates began to paint hip-hop as inherently violent, the unifying force of a perceived alien

enemy galvanized the rap audience. It seemed as though hip-hop would be attacked, that concerts, bookings, and dollars would be lost under the guise of preventing the violence that hip-hop "naturally" spawned. It seemed as if, in the final analysis, it was hip-hop against the world. And that meant Black folks against the world.

On a national level, KRS-ONE, the rapper of martyred DJ Scott LaRock, who between them formed BDP, promoted a different hip-hop image. The image he promoted remained, in some respects, in the context of B-boys, but importantly he began to push the image of a politically conscious "underclass." Here was a young gifted rapper, formerly homeless, whose DJ was murdered, promoting a perspective akin in some ways to that proffered by the early Black Panther Party (BPP). In this sense, the Black underclass was seen as a more lumpen proletariat class, in the sense of Fanon, the class with the most propitious prospects for organizing and producing revolution out of colonization. KRS-ONE's *By All Means Necessary* is a self-consciously Malcolm X inspired imaging of hip-hop and its potential as a force for Black self-determination. In this album, he implores Blacks, inter alia, that because many are educated, they must open their mouths and speak. Later KRS-ONE used some of the Afrocentric perspectives of Yosef ben-Jochanon in his anthem "You Must Learn" and argued for the teaching of Afrocentric history and provided in a video positive depictions of Blacks, including Black biblical figures such as Moses.

After imaging Minister Malcolm and invoking the Black Power Movement, he then rallied around him some of the most potent rappers in the business to attack the violent image of rap. The Stop the Violence Movement drew youthful Black consciousness to the impact of violence on Black people and to a large extent remade the image of hip-hop from the ceaseless violence of criminal gangs and stick-up kids to the responsibilities of young Black men and women intent on breaking them off something in a society that had denied them so much. Importantly, what was gaining play was not so much a Black nation as a "hip-hop nation." That is to say, the hip-hop nation invoked Black nationalism in a superficial way, but practice was something different. Hip-hop resurrected some de-

ceased African American images, particularly Malcolm X, but it didn't seem to elevate those leaders present today. Politics was too often reduced to showing Malcolm X or Martin King in a video instead of incorporating their precepts into praxis on the part of the rappers who evoked the images of these African American leaders. Too many rappers didn't even bother to make their lyrics, much less their actions, consistent with the philosophies or even the sound bites of these leaders and teachers.

There is a larger requirement for the Black artist because they are asserting their creativity within the context of their people being oppressed. Whatever they purportedly do in the community, the music must speak to this consistently in that it is the vehicle whereby much of their philosophy or lack of philosophy gets transmitted. What emerges from hip-hop should be a much different lyric and different music than that which germinates from the nonoppressed elements in this country, and because legitimate hip-hop emerges from the Black cultural context and its conceptual and geographical landscape, and because this is almost completely foreign to European Americans, then these White folks may not be able to produce legitimate hip-hop, to the extent that their cultural, caste, and class foci speaks to a different reality. On the other hand, it may be that so-called Hispanics can speak to a sentiment and agency that more consistently parallels those processes that devolved from the Black experience and ethos. From this line of reasoning it looks like Native American hip-hop "gonna be a @&#%$*."

The hip-hop nation, as opposed to the Black nation, promoted a "myth of action" whereby political responsibility, knowledge, and activity was garnered by proclamation and not by demonstration. This created a condition where people could practice one thing and preach another. This created the prospects for disillusionment among hip-hop fans who witnessed the stifling of their "revolutionary" performers when called to task by their primarily White bosses. This was perceived as the case with Public Enemy on the issue of Professor Griff, and most noticeably in the case of Ice-T and the Cop Killer dispute.

THE CENTRALITY OF PUBLIC ENEMY TO "NATION CONSCIOUS RAP"

It is impossible to consider the Black nationalist element in hip-hop without recognizing the seminal influence of Public Enemy. Planting nationalist seeds in their first album in the righteous piece "Rightstarter," their second album exploded the nationalist image as they stood flanked by their security forces, and invoking the religious and political Black nationalism of the Farrakhan led NOI, they provided the standard for "nation conscious rap." Importantly, unlike KRS-ONE who promoted disparate strands and strains of nationalist sentiment without a community-grounded institution, Public Enemy broke out with one of the most heralded and respected institutions in the Black community—the NOI. This fusion of rap and Black nationalist political organization promoted a politically grounded rap focus that continues to dominate the genre. Chuck D, the leader of the group, not only promoted through his lyrics the nationalist sentiment but also provided through his community activity a distinguishable practice of communitarian responsibility.

As rallies and public interest focused on the murders of Howard Beach, the lynching of Michael Donald, the attacks on Eleanor Bumpers, the Tawanna Brawley case, and the student uprisings at Columbia and the University of Michigan, Public Enemy focused youthful Black energy and consciousness in a way that no rap act ever had. Overtly promoted by and promoting Louis Farrakhan, Public Enemy helped bring thousands of young Blacks to the political philosophy of Black nationalism. For example, in "Party for your Right to Fight," a side from their second album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back*, Public Enemy transforms the title of the party rap from the Beastie Boys ("Fight for your Right to Party") into a powerful, though cursory, exegesis of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (i.e., the party for your right to fight). Here is evinced a movement away from the oppression-inspired nationalism of "The Message" toward a more self-determination-focused nationalism.

No other rap, this side of the joint, captured the ethos of Blacks in captivity in quite the way of "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos."[9]

Beyond the message to those physically incarcerated, the lyric was reminiscent of Malcolm X's assertion that simply to be Black in America, whether one was incarcerated or not, was to be in prison. Chuck D pushed this line of nationalism into the heralded "Fight the Power." But the overall sentiment that emerged from the religious-based nationalism of the NOI contrasted with the lumpen appeal of hip-hop for the young generation who, although they respected the so-called Black Muslims, had no intention of organizing with them. Principally, this motivation, or lack thereof, may be rooted in what Kelley (1992) refers to as a "Ghettocentric" view that predominates in many inner city communities.[10] More to the point, it actually reflects the subcultural locus of interests that emerge from the caste dynamic of U.S. society where inner city African Americans find themselves cast out of mainstream national culture and are forced to derive for themselves some requisite paradigm of interpreting a very different world than that contained in the paradigm of the dominant culture (i.e., it ain't the American dream).

What has emerged among the small cohort that is the hip-hop community in these urban centers (as opposed to the more lasting institutions that African Americans have built as life-giving and life-sustaining institutions in these same communities since the great migration) is a rather nihilistic and self-destructive set of tenets that emerge from the drive for survivalism in these inner city communities, which are usually not grounded in overtly African-centered dynamics or in disciplined religious formulations like those found in the NOI program. Also, at the same time, prior to the Dopebusters Program and the organizing of the NOI National Security as a business institution, the NOI was not prepared to organize with groups other than Black Muslims. Following Malcolm more than Muhammad, Farrakhan is attempting to overcome this rigidity.

The image of Malcolm X, more a caricature at times, holding his carbine peering through a curtained window captured the hip-hop nation and demanded less as a cost of followership than the rigid discipline of the NOI. And with the riff between Chuck D and Professor Griff—who was among the most vocal adherents of NOI

philosophy within Public Enemy—resulting in Griff's dismissal from the group, hip-hop followers used this cleavage to abrogate any responsibility of followership beyond proclamations of being "down." Further, the mysticism of NOI philosophy, the centering of Yacub's history, the making of a messiah/god out of a non-Black Farad Muhammad, countered the more cultural-based nationalism and revolutionary Black nationalism of an emergent and philosophically thirsty Black youth.

What was missing in the Public Enemy appeal was the same elements missing in the NOI: a cultural focus on African tradition and practice as opposed to a pseudo-Asiatic/Arab and/or Muslim foci, as well as a transformative philosophy rooted in Black agency, action, and representation, and not awaiting a messiah. A group centered on the stylings and flavor of the son of a legendary Black community activist organized around these very precepts emerged and helped change the face of hip-hop. This was X-Clan.

X-Clan fused aspects of Karenga's (1980) Kawaida and aspects of revolutionary Black nationalism. X-Clan grounded their Black nationalism in Black culture and in protest that was present day and not simply hearkening back to dead heroes. The overtly Kemetic (Egyptian) imagery and philosophy were much more studied and apparent in X-Clan than in the earlier treatment of KRS-ONE. In fact X-Clan chastised the hollow humanism of KRS-ONE as a sort of nouveau integrationist sellout under the guise of multiculturalism. X-Clan was forthright in their Black nationalism. They coupled their rap with the organizational focus of The Blackwatch Movement, which is a Black nationalist organization seeded in several cities. With the boycott of Korean grocers and the explosion of the Black and White communities following the murder of Yusuf Hawkins in Bensonhurst, Blacks organized "Days of Outrage" as a form of protest. X-Clan gave expression to both the sentiment and the activities that both fostered and resulted from continued attacks on Black self-determination.

X-Clan not only positioned Black nationalism in its political aspect at the center of hip-hop, it pushed nationalist rap stars, including Public Enemy, back to a more political, as opposed to a religious, Black nationalism following what some considered a

weaker almost integrationist sentimentalizing in Public Enemy's third album, *Fear of a Black Planet*. In this album, although the first release, "Welcome to the Terrordome" was vintage PE (Public Enemy), Chuck appeared to be responding more to attacks on him from Whites, particularly European-Jewish Americans, and was not so much pushing the nationalist position. The next album, *Apocalypse 91: The Empire Strikes Black*, resurrected the politically based nationalist position of PE, especially in what I consider to be the album's three core cuts "Can't Truss It," "By the Time I Get to Arizona," and the exceptional "Shut Em Down."

The imagery that was portrayed in the videos of these three cuts was exceptional. In the first, present-day conditions of African Americans, especially following the attacks on Rodney King, are juxtaposed against the era of the Holocaust of Enslavement: slave auctions analogized to employment lines, agricultural plantations analogized to industrial plants, rape on the plantation to sexual harassment in the workplace, and finally lynching to the beating of Rodney King. The video's effect is heightened by the fact that it is filmed in Black and White. "By the Time I Get to Arizona" provides narrative for a concerted attempt to assassinate the legislative leadership of a state that fails to officially sanction and recognize the Martin Luther King holiday.

Here PE takes the prototypic symbol of nonviolence, Martin Luther King, and depicts retribution for the sufferings visited upon African Americans before, during, and after the movements that he helped to lead. In so doing, PE asserts all African Americans' right to put history in our own image and interests. They are not forced to only invoke what Martin King invoked. They are not forced to only "dream" the way that the White media as well as the Black integrationist "leadership" attempts to constrain thought, analysis, or interpretations of Martin King. Although King went to his death as an apostle of nonviolence, that does not mean that all we can learn from King is nonviolence. This is the relevance of PE. We have a duty and obligation as heirs and custodians of a powerful legacy to both remember and interpret history, but to also cast it in a liberating light so that we may construct vehicles and institutions to perpetuate the best of us as a people.

For nationalists, we can accept aspects of King's leadership and his philosophy, but even in our analysis of him, and much more of the movement, we are not limited by this. White supremacists, Black and White, have great difficulty with this aspect of self-determination, primarily because it attacks their authority as the definers of truth, righteousness, historical accuracy, and morality. The parade of integrationist Negroes that chastised PE's video stand as testament to the prevalence and enduring nature of White supremacy.

Finally, "Shut Em Down" moved the imagery of Black nationalism beyond the simply caricaturing of Malcolm X. In this video, also done in Black and White, PE depicts some of the greatest heroes of the Black power movement over a pulsing bass line and Chuck D's hailing baritone invoking the Black masses to shut down those elements and institutions that do not provide for and promote Black community development. To my mind, in all three videos, PE attempts to redefine and reposition Black nationalism around demystified and responsible historical interpretation. This is most evident in "Can't Truss It" and "By the Time I Get to Arizona." PE also shows respect and homage for the heroes of Black nationalism while acknowledging responsible community praxis. Implicit in "Shut Em Down" is PE's admonition to rappers to join in struggle with their communities. This was as much the result, I would argue, from the push of X-Clan as it was from the evolving political maturity of Public Enemy.

A CHALLENGE TO THOSE WHO ASSUME A NATIONALIST POSTURE

This longer treatment of PE over other acts is not to suggest that as goes PE, so goes Black nationalist hip-hop. PE's centrality insofar as promoting Black nationalism, however, is widely respected even among those who are not recognized for being politically conscious.[11] What is important in the development of PE is that it parallels much of the development of Black nationalism in hip-hop—good and bad. Much of the positive side has been stated, but on the other side, PE has also been responsible for promoting a

"politics as theater" approach to nationalism. This aspect of the melodramatizing of political action was taken up by the White rap group 3rd Bass, who made a parody of the precision fancy drill of PE's security forces in their rap "Gas Face." Moreover, PE helped to promote another rather deleterious aspect of nationalist hip-hop: the myth of action. The myth of action, a term borrowed from Maulana Karenga, promotes proclamation over demonstration. That is, real community organizing and political grounding are forsaken, or never undertaken. Pursued instead is a sort of fantasizing or abstracting of action that usually is no more than hollow melodrama that nonetheless passes, in some circles, for positive political action.

Interestingly it was PE protégée Sister Souljah who, after earning a reputation as a community organizer especially of community oriented hip-hop concerts, promoted the "raptivist" image of rap star and activist. She gained national attention, not from her raps, or from her appearances in PE's as well as her own videos, but as the brunt of Bill Clinton's attack on the Rainbow Coalition in his attempt to further distance himself and in many ways renounce Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition and his perceived leftist populism, to ensure Clinton the "Bubba" vote among the White middle-income groups in the country. Souljah used this national attention and responded in concert with much of the nationalist audience in repudiation of both Clinton and his right to position himself as a moral teacher for her personally and for Black people as a whole. But the nationalist community's last national images of PE were its video with White heavy metal rock group Anthrax performing "Bring The Noise." Somehow I don't think the nationalist audience assumed that the noise PE was talking about bringing was performing with a White metal band.

But this is the same course that Los Angeles gangsta rapper Ice-T pursued. Going even further, he put together a metal band, known as Body Count, and performed at metal sites such as CBGB's and then performed on the Lollapolluza tour. Ice-T has at one time or another promoted an image of a pimp daddy mack, a dope peddler, a businessman, a political teacher, a gangsta, and a revolutionary. Reality casts Ice-T in a much different light than any of these: He

is a professional performer, an entertainer, and as such he is quite interesting and even good. However, for a revolutionary, or even a reformer, he makes for a good rapper. Ice-T is not so much nationalist but gangsterish. Ice-T's nationalism may have emerged from his producer Afrika Islam who is also down with the Zulu Nation and who went out west to produce Ice-T.

The gangsta posture took some of the focus off the emergent nationalism epitomized in KRS-ONE and PE in the East. It also was the bread and butter of west coast hip-hop. This was due to the fact that the territorial gang element in the West, especially in Los Angeles, is more defining than that same element in the Northeast home of hip-hop. Like their East Coast predecessors before them, the West Coast "all stars" came together with a concerted nationalist focus around the issue of violence in hip-hop and in the Black community. This was undertaken in the track entitled "We're All in the Same Gang."[12] Earlier, Ice-T had made a very lucid point about the use and abuse of the term *violence* when it came to hip-hop. He pointed out in "Squeeze the Trigger," in his *Rhyme Pays* that rap music did not cause violence any more than soccer matches, hockey games, or nuclear peace rallies—all the sites of some form of violence. The larger and important point was that youth live in a violent society, and at its best, the music that captured this ethos would evoke violent images. Therefore it is foolish to assume, as many policy makers did, that rap music was causing violence as opposed to reflecting the violence within many urban communities.

Ice-T moved from what could be considered the petty gangsterism that was evocative of the original *Hustler's Convention* to *Power*, which though good musically, showed more that people who operate at the margins of power understand very little about real power. Although attempting to promote both the gangsta and intelligent hoodlum image, as well as a nationalist one, Ice-T instead put himself in a position to publicly admonish LL Cool J for much of what he himself proclaimed in his first album, and in many ways in all of his albums. LL Cool J was the biggest hip-hop act going at the time. He responded to Ice-T's dis powerfully and humorously and Grandmaster Caz and probably Afrika Islam and the Zulu Nation mediated the dispute (Eure & Spady, 1991, p. xv).

But the real significance of the Ice-T episode in regards to nationalism and activism is the response he chose for the activity of the police departments against his "Cop Killer" album. For all his proclamation, Ice-T simply succumbed to public pressure. Not only that, he went down proclaiming his defense of Warner Brothers, a multibillion dollar enterprise. As Maulana Karenga (1993) pointed out, When has a multibillion dollar industry needed a Black man to defend it? Others proclaimed that Ice-T went out like a sucker. After promoting the myth of cop killer and peeling suckers' caps back and taking out cops in defense of righteous Black peoples, he stood up to "defend" one of the same companies that has been accused of ripping off Black talent, destroying Black competition in independent record companies, and stifling Black commercial development in distribution and other nonperformance aspects of the recording industry. He, like Ice Cube, later would proclaim all sorts of activism from the safety of nice homes or movie sets.

Ice Cube, who, after leading the gangsta rap group NWA, hooked up with the NOI, lost his jheri curl, and found himself in Blackness, and who sat almost teary eyed on national television speaking out on the violence of the Los Angeles revolt and his personal worry about his personal loss and his personal friends, promoted himself months later and found no remorse in proclaiming himself and his crew as the "pride of Africa" and "Guerillas in da Midst" and as "wicked" revolutionaries all over south central during the burning. It's incredible the selective amnesia that some of these rappers would want us to have. Like Souljah and her armed bands of "revolutionaries," Ice Cube's "Lench Mob" are the urban guerillas intent on hastening the "revolution" that is sure to come. Souljah, one of the most community grounded among the "raptivists," nonetheless, irresponsibly (vis-à-vis our Black liberation history) evokes images of herself leading armed revolutionaries in urban centers because the Black nation is, by her account, "at war," though she still finds time from the battlefield to make music videos and promote her own image over those of people who did and are doing the actual fighting, such as sister Assata, Jalil Muntaquin, Sekou Odinga, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and nameless others who struggle determinedly, persistently. Somehow I don't think this is

what Geronimo Pratt or even brother Nat and sister Queen Mother Moore envisioned.

A corollary to the above is the major pretension of many rappers—nationalist and otherwise—who proclaim their depictions of wanton violence and sexism are nonetheless appropriate because they are speaking the reality that they see everyday. This rationalization is vacuous on two levels. First, despite notions of being "true to the game," many of these rappers are speaking a "reality" that is not theirs—though it may be "real" and prevalent to others—and is constantly exaggerated, glamorized, and hyped. There is no better example than the Detroit born rapper "Boss," Lichelle Laws, who has to be one of the most hypocritical "voices of the street." She reportedly grew up in a middle-class Detroit neighborhood where she attended ballet and piano class and private schools through high school. Nonetheless, the 24-year-old was making a handsome living spewing some of the most virulent and violent "gangsta" rap. Either ballet classes are much more violent today than in the past or many rappers simply parrot and parley the racist image of Black thuggery to misled Black youths and eager White audiences ready to consume this modern minstrel.

Another and probably deeper point is that raised by Karenga (1993). He attacks the notion that rappers are just interpreting their reality. Notwithstanding the earlier point concerning whose reality it is, rappers have, according to Karenga, a responsibility beyond simply mirroring "reality." He analogizes the situation of the Black community and rappers to that of a drowning man who is shown a mirror. He argues that the person showing the drowning man the mirror is showing the man reality. However, Karenga maintains, that person holding the mirror has a greater responsibility to the drowning man than that of "interpreting" his reality. There is the added responsibility of changing that reality, in this case giving him a hand or throwing a rope. Rappers, who are making their pockets fatter helping themselves, are not, for the most part, transforming reality, or even understanding their responsibility to change it. And to the extent that the Black community is drowning, the requirement for change is not for mirror holders with sagging pants, who tout guns, flout responsibility, and disrespect women, all the while

invoking hollow phrases of being pro-Black and down with the people. Further, the nihilism in much of rap only glamorizes further violence and sexism instead of a social practice of African-centered liberation to transform Black communities. This is the minimum requirement for would-be liberation, those who invoke images of Malcolm, the BPP, and King. This is far beyond the empty rhetoric of "by any means necessary." And for those who argue that their efforts are righteous because they get paid, we must counter that there must be some things that we will not do for money. People were paid for the holocaust of enslavement, but that did not make it correct. Infiltrators were paid to betray liberation struggles. It is a nihilism bordering on inhumanity that allows both the manufacturing of misogynist products and a celebration of people dancing to their own degradation. Much of the nihilistic imaging, in reality, is promoted, if not created, by White industry executives as well as by miseducated Blacks masquerading as chroniclers of the "Black experience."

The real shame of this is that in all their hollow theatrics is lost the lesson that there have been in our Black community those who have righteously, when they found it necessary, taken up arms to fight against the inhumanity and injustice that White supremacists have visited upon us. These are among our greatest heroes in this country. They go back as far as the Seminole and maroon warriors, Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Lucy Parsons, Ida B. Wells Barnett, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth, and they include but are not limited to those among us today in the person of Queen Mother Moore, Chris Alston, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Dhoruba Bin Wahad, Geronimo Pratt, Assata Shakur, Sundiata Acoli, Albert "Nuh" Washington, Ahmed Rahman, Cicero Love, Safiya Bukhari-Alston, Jalil Muntaquin, Ruchell Magee, Sharif Willis, Falaka Fattah, Marian Nzinga Stammps, Jamil Amin, Kwame Toure, Aneb Kgotsile, Akua Njeri, Imari Obadele, Maulana Karenga, Chokwe Lumumba, General Baker, the BPP, RNA, Us (as opposed to them), NOI, New African People's Organization (NAPO), Black Liberation Army (BLA), and all those who have taken up arms in revolt and otherwise risked their lives in the name of their people. The hollow imaging of these Black rap acts does

not resurrect the images of the best of our Black community, it bastardizes it. It spits on the grave of Boyd, Brown, and Bethune, Marx Essex, Fred Hampton, Twyman Myers, Zayd Shakur, Mark Clark, Jake Winters, and a litany of others. These actions are self-serving and self-aggrandizing and as such should be severely criticized if not condemned. The true potential in rap is to be discovered in the fact that even with these shortcomings, rappers as entertainers have remained far more central and focused than their contemporaries in R&B. Comparisons of rappers with other entertainers is appropriate; however, the present attempt to compare their hollow theatrics with political organization does a great disservice to the legacy of those who struggled for our liberation.

A FUTURE FOR NATIONALISM IN HIP-HOP

These rappers should be appreciated as entertainers but criticized as political leaders or spokespersons. The media itself promotes in them an aura of leadership most of them do not warrant and have not cultivated; however, what is promising is that many have linked up to the positive nationalist organizational elements in the Black community and have become more grounded in their political exegeses. The future is promising in this regard. Young rappers need to learn, not only from the older rap counterparts and community organizers but also from the old jazz acts like Billie Holliday, John Coltrane, Dinah Washington, Nina Simone, McCoy Tyner, Earl Van Dyke, and Miles Davis, Gil Scott Heron, Bilal Sunni Ali, to name just a few. They also must ground with the community and organize with some of our veterans such as those mentioned above, as well as those in the movements around Afrocentrism, reparations, and peace. Such grounding ensures political sophistication and proscribes this fantasy island type nationalism surrounded by a myth of action. Rappers must continually confront the questions Fanon (1968) posed to us as the fundamental questions that Africans must deal with every day: (a) Who am I? (b) Am I who I think I am? and (c) Am I all that I ought to be? The real answers to these questions may surprise them.

It is my position that it's going to be local not the national acts that resupply the nationalistic vigor that many have either forsaken or given lip service to. This is due to the demands on big-time groups to overfantasize and overly indulge themselves and their reputations while decreasing their accessibility to the local community. The result is that they are no longer grounded in anything but the superficial and faddish concerns of their (now abandoned) community. Moreover, the effective nationalist organizers are more often grassroots members who are in the very communities that the rap stars have since left or become out of touch with. Remember even when acts stay in communities, it is possible to no longer be able to relate to that community because success and money many times blind people to anything but their own myopic misperceptions of reality. For nationalism to remain in hip-hop and become a grounding for a more effective expression of African American national culture and institution building, local acts with this focus should be promoted and national acts should both legitimize extant nationalist organizations and our nationalist leaders and also promote new nationalist and African-centered institutions among the hip-hop community itself.

Finally, it should be understood that the nihilism in hip-hop and the glamorization of hip-hop "culture" really represents the absence of national culture (African-centered culture) among those claimants. It also promotes the lumpen image, or the criminal image as *the* image of African Americans. Minister Malcolm is instructive in this regard. He pointed out on one occasion that it was not a shame to have been a criminal, but it is a shame to remain a criminal. This glamorization of negative imaging is all the more telling in light of the fact that much of rap, especially so-called gangsta rap, increasingly plays to a White audience (Samuels, 1991) and is widely consumed by White youths who find little difficulty accepting the stereotypical criminality of Black youth and the degeneration of Black women.

Many African American youth are struggling around issues of manhood and womanhood. These definitions are rooted in identity. Identities are derived from culture. Definitions of manhood and womanhood (more specific identities) are derived from culture. If,

as in the African American community, you have people who have been denied their culture by White supremacism, and youth who believe they have no culture, the African American community will devise one for themselves. Therefore, you will have a "hip-hop" culture full of youth with definitions of their identity and the rites of passage into manhood/womanhood defined by Euro-American guns, drug retailing, foreign made gym shoes, White distributed music, 40s, sexism, and misguided pronouncements of righteousness. Moreover, you will have the glamorization of the killing of other African Americans. Youth will know Tupac Shakur and glamorize or rationalize his self-destructive "thug life" but remain ignorant of Mutulu and Afeni Shakur.[13] It is not hip-hop's responsibility to change all of this; that burden falls upon us all. It is the responsibility of all artists of oppressed groups to speak meaningfully in their art, sometime, someplace, to the liberation of their people.

In the final analysis, it's up to us to educate our youth and to demand of our youth an appropriate respect for their true heritage, legacy, and the responsibility that accompanies both. We must be the example. And that example is best demonstrated by our everyday practice and grounding with them in our own communities first, and in every situation that we may find ourselves.

NOTES

1. Cited in Fanon (1968, p. 206).

2. On the relationship between national culture and popular culture, Cabral (1973) argued that within culture is found the seed of opposition that leads to the fashioning of the liberation movement. Asante (1993, p. 120) suggests the prospect in Afrocentrism is to recenter the "decentered, dislocated, and disoriented youth." Karenga (1993, p. 414) maintains that part of the relevance of rap music is its promotion of a sense of community among Black youth centered on a nationalist consciousness raising. Unfortunately rap's mixed messages of positive consciousness are often muted by its sexism, lumpen glorification, and at times hypocritical pronouncements of Black activism.

3. See Madhubuti (1973, 1978).

4. However, for performers, having a home base did not preclude the need for security. Herc was among the first to have his own home base whereas others were primarily restricted to house parties. He had the Hevalo on Jerome Avenue during 1974 before moving around

the block to the Executive Playhouse, which since changed its name to Sparkle. Even with a home base, in one infamous incident, Herc was attacked and knifed at a performance.

5. See interview with Grandmaster Caz in Eure and Spady's (1991) *Nation Conscious Rap*. Charles Henry's (1992, p. 34) *Culture and African American Politics* makes the point that

> Rap music developed out of local block parties in the Black ghetto. These parties, often in housing projects, were associated with gangs who occupied their turf. To protect themselves and keep the peace at their parties, all well-known rap crews became affiliated with "security forces." Membership in security force crews like the Casanova Crew, the Nine Crew, and the Zulu Nation ranged from six hundred to thousands. Most rappers were forced to find security from local "stick up kids." Security forces themselves were largely composed of hoodlums, although their energies were channeled into rap competition. Black gang warfare declined dramatically during this period (1978-81).

Henry, like too many others, offers little empirical evidence for his assertions about the "hoodlums" involved in security that "all" rappers employed. Such irresponsible assertions feed the hype that hip-hop and violence or criminality are synonymous; however, it is clear that there was and remains an association between hip-hop and gangs, but these are not strictly criminal gangs.

6. Caz makes the point that early on there wasn't much unity in hip-hop, but then "We brought Brooklyn to Manhattan. Cause you would never see anybody from Brooklyn nowhere but in Brooklyn. You would never see too many people go to Brooklyn either, cause they was . . . everybody stuck to their shit. But the hip-hop movement got everybody travelling" (Eure & Spady, 1991, p. xiv).

7. Here we mean the spirited and hyped competition between rappers and DJs.

8. Their recent marriage with Pete Rock and CL Smooth seemed to have allowed for renewed acceptance of the former kings. Additionally, it could be argued that Run DMC's crossover ambivalence was evident in the choice of title for their anthem: "King of Rock," instead of what may have been the more apropos title of "King of Rap." Although the former, it could be argued, rightly appropriates for African American artists the mantle of rock and roll music, which was spawned by Black legends dating back to Big Mama Thornton, we could also make the point that the rap artists should have promoted their own genre, explicitly, as an authentic and culturally grounded articulation of African American music and worthy of its own, at least figuratively, sire.

9. As opposed to incarceration, captivity denotes imprisonment that is primarily the result of political activity and not explicitly criminal activity. Or, closer to the truth, it is incarceration that is the result of the criminalization of self-determination under conditions of oppression: Therefore, Geronimo Pratt, Ahmed Rahman, Dhoruba bin-Wahad, Assata Shakur, Jalil Muntaquin, George Jackson, Huey Newton, Maulana Karenga, Imari Obadele, Panther 21, Wilmington 10, RNA 11, and many others were or are in captivity.

10. Kelley (1992, p. 38) defines Ghettocentric as "the identity in which the specific class, race and gendered experiences in late capitalist urban centers coalesce to crate a new identity—'Nigga.' " Further, he states that "Nigga is not merely another word for Black; it encompasses a specific class, spatial, and to a large degree, gendered subject position." He goes on to make the obvious point that "the experiences of young Black men in the inner city are not universal to all Black people, and in fact, they recognize that some African-Americans play a role in perpetuating their oppression" (p. 40). Kelley misses the point that

what he calls "Ghettocentric" is only part of the focus that emerges from the perceptions of many youth in the inner city that comes from their disillusionment with the national culture that has designated them outcastes but appeals to them, nonetheless, through White supremacism as a constituent, though denatured part of the American whole. It is within this caste relationship that the African centeredness of the African American has been incubated and through which it persists. This is not simply an urban phenomenon but is a diasporic phenomenon (Henderson, 1995).

Nigga is nothing more than a variant of nigger with the same White supremacist connotations, it is not deeper than that. To attempt to derive other meanings is about as useful as saying that a "bitch" is not intended to be degrading but only implies "beautiful intelligent teachers of cultural heritage." Rappers Bytches With Problems nonsensically maintain the assertive "positive" characteristic of the term. This is no more nonsensical than Tupac's assertion that nigga represents "Never Ignorant, Getting Goals Accomplished." It is not that nigga has to have any positive connotation at all. It obviously does not invoke a racial response among many Blacks as between Blacks and Whites, but this is because it has, most notably, been used as a White supremacist statement. However, when used by members of the same race, that racist motivation is not as apparent and is in many cases ignored. What is important to understand is that this identification is rooted in the dominance of the White supremacist culture and its infusion into all the captured national groups in the United States (Obadele, 1986). The "Ghettocentric" hip-hopsters are not immune to this process, and they are similarly ingrained with much of the White supremacism that is the driving force of the dominant culture in this country, their proclamations to the contrary notwithstanding.

11. On their album, *Can't Hold Us Back*, the self-style ghetto gangsters, the Geto Boys, present PE an apocryphal award for being so "dam" Black.

12. Whereas the East Coast track ended with Chuck D's shrill lyric that called for unity and love, the West Coast version, although theatrically more engaging, ended with the late Eazy-E's warning to stay off the streets as well as his characterization of himself as "the violent hero."

13. It is ironic that Tupac Shakur, presently serving a prison sentence for a rape conviction, has only with that conviction begun to promote favorable images of his mother's Black Panther Party legacy in his music videos. Additionally, he has repudiated his "thug life" style. This may not suggest any transformation on the part of the rapper but only indicate the great difficulty in portraying that image in a prison among serious "thugs" as opposed to portraying it in the media. Worse, though, has been the failure of many in the "hip-hop nation" to hold him accountable for the totality of his destructive message. Only with his recent attempt to character assassinate associates present at the incident where he was shot (see Freddy, 1995) have rappers and some fans begun to admonish, criticize, and righteously hold accountable this would-be, and self-proclaimed, thug/revolutionary/family man/spokesman for a generation . . . and so on.

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