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HIDDEN POLITICS

*Discursive and Institutional
Policing of Rap Music*

♦ Tricia Rose

... The way rap and rap-related violence are discussed in the popular media is fundamentally linked to the larger social discourse on the spatial control of black people. Formal policies that explicitly circumscribe housing, school, and job options for black people have been outlawed; however, informal, yet trenchant forms of institutional discrimination still exist in full force. Underwriting these de facto forms of social containment is the understanding that black people are a threat to social order. Inside of this, black urban teenagers are the most profound symbolic referent for internal threats to social order. Not surprisingly, then, young African Americans are in fundamentally antagonistic relationships to the institutions that most prominently frame and constrain their lives. The public school system, the police, and the popular media perceive and construct young African Americans as a dangerous internal element in urban America; an element that if allowed to roam freely, will threaten the social order; an element that must be policed. Since rap music is understood as the predominant symbolic voice of black urban males, it heightens this sense

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of threat and reinforces dominant white middle-class objections to urban black youths who do not aspire to (but are haunted by) white middle-class standards.

My experiences and observations while attending several large-venue rap concerts in major urban centers serve as disturbingly obvious cases of how black urban youth are stigmatized, vilified, and approached with hostility and suspicion by authority figures. I offer a description of my confrontation and related observations not simply to prove that such racially and class-motivated hostility exists but, instead, to use it as a case from which to tease out how the public space policing of black youth and rap music feeds into and interacts with other media, municipal, and corporate policies that determine who can publicly gather and how.

Thousands of young black people milled around waiting to get into the large arena. The big rap summer tour was in town, and it was a prime night to see and be seen. The "pre-show show" was in full effect. Folks were dressed in the latest fly-gear: bicycle shorts, high-top sneakers, chunk jewelry, baggie pants, and polka-dotted tops. Hair style was a fashion show in itself: high-top fade designs, dreads, corkscrews, and braids with gold and purple sparkles. Crews of young women were checking out the brothers; posses of brothers were scoping out the sisters, each comparing styles among themselves. Some wide-eyed preteenyboppers were soaking in the teenage energy, thrilled to be out with the older kids.

As the lines for entering the arena began to form, dozens of mostly white private security guards hired by the arena management (many of whom are off-duty cops making extra money), dressed in red polyester V-neck sweaters and gray work pants, began corralling the crowd through security checkpoints. The free-floating spirit began to sour, and in its place began to crystallize a sense of hostility mixed with humiliation. Men and women were lined up separately in preparation for the weapon search. Each of the concertgoers would go through a body patdown, pocketbook, knapsack, and

soul search. Co-ed groups dispersed, people moved toward their respective search lines. The search process was conducted in such a way that each person being searched was separated from the rest of the line. Those searched could not function as a group, and subtle interactions between the guard and person being searched could not be easily observed. As the concertgoers approached the guards, I noticed a distinct change in posture and attitude. From a distance, it seemed that the men were being treated with more hostility than the women in line. In the men's area, there was an almost palpable sense of hostility on behalf of the guards as well as the male patrons. Laughing and joking among men and women, which had been loud and buoyant up until this point, turned into virtual silence.

As I approached the female security guards, my own anxiety increased. What if they found something I was not allowed to bring inside? What was prohibited, anyway? I stopped and thought: All I have in my small purse is my wallet, eyeglasses, keys, and a notepad—nothing "dangerous." The security woman patted me down, scanned my body with an electronic scanner while she anxiously kept an eye on the other black women in line to make sure that no one slipped past her. She opened my purse and fumbled through it pulling out a nail file. She stared at me provocatively, as if to say "why did you bring this in here?" I didn't answer her right away and hoped that she would drop it back into my purse and let me go through. She continued to stare at me, sizing me up to see if I was "there to cause trouble." By now, my attitude had turned foul; my childlike enthusiasm to see my favorite rappers had all but fizzled out. I didn't know the file was in my purse, but the guard's accusatory posture rendered such excuses moot. I finally replied tensely, "It's a nail file, what's the problem?" She handed it back to me, satisfied, I suppose, that I was not intending to use it as a weapon, and I went in to the arena. As I passed her, I thought to myself, "This arena is a public place, and I am entitled

to come here and bring a nail file if I want to." But these words rang empty in my head; the language of entitlement couldn't erase my sense of alienation. I felt harassed and unwanted. This arena wasn't mine, it was hostile, alien territory. The unspoken message hung in the air: "You're not wanted here, let's get this over with and send you all back to where you came from."

I recount this incident for two reasons. First, a hostile tenor, if not actual verbal abuse, is a regular part of rap fan contact with arena security and police. This is not an isolated or rare example, incidents similar to it continue to take place at many rap concerts.¹ Rap concertgoers were barely tolerated and regarded with heightened suspicion. Second, arena security forces, a critical facet in the political economy of rap and its related sociologically based crime discourse, contribute to the high level of anxiety and antagonism that confront young African Americans. Their military posture is a surface manifestation of a complex network of ideological and economic processes that "justify" the policing of rap music, black youths, and black people in general. Although my immediate sense of indignation in response to public humiliation may be related to a sense of entitlement that comes from my status as a cultural critic, thus separating me from many of the concertgoers, my status as a young African American woman is a critical factor in the way I was treated in this instance, as well as many others.²

Rap artists articulate a range of reactions to the scope of institutional policing faced by many young African Americans. However, the lyrics that address the police directly—what Ice Cube has called "revenge fantasies"—have caused the most extreme and unconstitutional reaction from law enforcement officials in metropolitan concert arena venues. The precedent-setting example took place in 1989 and involved Compton-based rap group NWA (Niggas with Attitude) that at that time featured Ice Cube as a lead rapper. Their album *Straight Outta Compton* contained a cinematic,

well-crafted, gritty, and vulgar rap entitled "___ the Police," which in the rap itself filled in the f.u.c.k. at every appropriate opportunity. This song and its apparent social resonance among rap fans and black youths in general provoked an unprecedented official FBI letter from Milt Ahlerich, an FBI assistant director, which expressed the FBI's concern over increasing violence (indirectly linking music to this increase) and stating that, as law enforcement officials "dedicate their lives to the protection of our citizens . . . recordings such as the one from NWA are both discouraging and degrading to the brave, dedicated officers." He justifies this targeting of NWA by suggesting that the song allegedly advocates violence against police officers. As far as Ahlerich knows, the FBI has never adopted an official position on a record, book, or artwork in the history of the agency.³ NWA's "___ the Police" is what finally smoked them out. This official statement would be extraordinary enough, given its tenuous constitutionality, but what follows is even worse. According to Dave Marsh and Phyllis Pollack, nobody at the agency purchased the record, nor could Ahlerich explain how he had received these lyrics other than from "responsible fellow officers." Furthermore, Ahlerich's letter fueled an informal fax network among police agencies that urged cops to help cancel NWA's concerts. Marsh and Pollack summarize the effects of this campaign:

Since late spring (of 1989), their shows have been jeopardized or aborted in Detroit (where the group was briefly detained by cops), Washington, D.C., Chattanooga, Milwaukee, and Tyler, Texas. NWA played Cincinnati only after Bengal linebacker and City Councilman Reggie Williams and several of his teammates spoke up for them. During the summer's tour, NWA prudently chose not to perform "___ the Police" (its best song), and just singing a few lines of it at Detroit's Joe Louis arena caused the Motor City police to rush the

stage. While the cops scuffled with the security staff, NWA escaped to their hotel. Dozens of policemen were waiting for them there, and they detained the group for 15 minutes. "We just wanted to show the kids," an officer told the *Hollywood Reporter*, "that you can't say 'fuck the police' in Detroit."⁴

Unless, of course, you're a cop. Clearly, police forces have almost unchallengeable entree in these arenas. If the police break through security to rush the stage, whom do security call to contain the police? Or as KRS-One might say, "Who Protects Us From You?" These large arenas are not only surveilled, but also they are, with the transmission of a police fax, subject to immediate occupation. What "justifies" this occupation? A symbolic challenge to the police in a song that, as Marsh and Pollack observe, "tells of a young man who loses his temper over brutal police sweeps based on appearance, not actions, like the ones frequently performed by the LAPD. In the end the young man threatens to smoke the next flatfoot who fucks with him." It is clearly not in the interests of business owners to challenge the police on these matters, they cannot afford to jeopardize their access to future police services, so that the artists, in this case, find themselves fleeing the stage after attempting to perform a song that is supposed to be constitutionally protected.

It is this ideological position on black youth that frames the media and institutional attacks on rap and separates resistance to rap from attacks sustained by rock 'n' roll artists. Rap music is by no means the only form of expression under attack. Popular white forms of expression, especially heavy metal, have recently been the target of increased sanctions and assaults by politically and economically powerful organizations, such as the Parent's Music Resource Center, The American Family Association, and Focus on the Family. These organizations are not fringe groups, they are supported by major corporations, national-level

politicians, school associations, and local police and municipal officials.⁵

However, there are critical differences between the attacks made against black youth expression and white youth expression. The terms of the assault on rap music, for example, are part of a long-standing sociologically based discourse that considers black influences a cultural threat to American society.⁶ Consequently, rappers, their fans, and black youths in general are constructed as coconspirators in the spread of black cultural influence. For the antirock organizations, heavy metal is a "threat to the fiber of American society," but the fans (e.g., "our children") are victims of its influence. Unlike heavy metal's victims, rap fans are the youngest representatives of a black presence whose cultural difference is perceived as an internal threat to America's cultural development. They victimize us. These differences in the ideological nature of the sanctions against rap and heavy metal are of critical importance, because they illuminate the ways in which racial discourses deeply inform public transcripts and social control efforts. This racial discourse is so profound that when Ice-T's speed metal band (*not rap group*) Body Count was forced to remove "Cop Killer" from its debut album because of attacks from politicians, these attacks consistently referred to it as a rap song (even though it in no way can be mistaken for rap) to build a negative head of steam in the public. As Ice-T describes it, "There is absolutely no way to listen to the song 'Cop Killer' and call it a rap record. It's so far from rap. But, politically, they know by saying the word *rap* they can get a lot of people who think, 'Rap-black-rap-black-ghetto,' and don't like it. You say the word *rock*, people say, 'Oh, but I like Jefferson Airplane, I like Fleetwood Mac—that's rock.' They don't want to use the word *rock & roll* to describe this song."⁷ . . .

The social construction of "violence," that is, when and how particular acts are defined as violent, is part of a larger process of labeling social phenomena.⁸ Rap-related

violence is one facet of the contemporary "urban crisis" that consists of a "rampant drug culture" and "wilding gangs" of black and Hispanic youths. When the *Daily News* headline reads, "L.I. Rap-Slayers Sought" or a *Newsweek* story is dubbed "The Rap Attitude," these labels are important, because they assign a particular meaning to an event and locate that event in a larger context.⁹ Labels are critical to the process of interpretation, because they provide a context and frame for social behavior. As Stuart Hall et al. point out in *Policing the Crisis*, once a label is assigned, "the use of the label is likely to mobilize this whole referential context, with all its associated meaning and connotations."¹⁰ The question then, is not "is there really violence at rap concerts," but how are these crimes contextualized, labeled? . . . Whose interests do these interpretive strategies serve? What are the repercussions?

Venue owners have the final word on booking decisions, but they are not the only group of institutional gatekeepers. The other major powerbroker, the insurance industry, can refuse to insure an act approved by venue management. In order for any tour to gain access to a venue, the band or group hires a booking agent who negotiates the act's fee. The booking agent hires a concert promoter who "purchases" the band and then presents the band to both the insurance company and the venue managers. If an insurance company will not insure the act, because they decide it represents an unprofitable risk, then the venue owner will not book the act. Furthermore, the insurance company and the venue owner reserve the right to charge whatever insurance or permit fees they deem reasonable on a case-by-case basis. So, for example, Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, tripled its normal \$20,000 permit fee for the Grateful Dead. The insurance companies who still insure rap concerts have raised their minimum coverage from about \$500,000 to between \$4 and 5 million worth of coverage per show.¹¹ Several major arenas make it almost impossible

to book a rap show, and others have refused outright to book rap acts at all.

These responses to rap music bear a striking resemblance to the New York City cabaret laws instituted in the 1920s in response to jazz music. A wide range of licensing and zoning laws, many of which remained in effect until the late 1980s, restricted the places where jazz could be played and how it could be played. These laws were attached to moral anxieties regarding black cultural effects and were in part intended to protect white patrons from jazz's "immoral influences." They defined and contained the kind of jazz that could be played by restricting the use of certain instruments (especially drums and horns) and established elaborate licensing policies that favored more established and mainstream jazz club owners and prevented a number of prominent musicians with minor criminal records from obtaining cabaret cards.¹²

During an interview with "Richard" from a major talent agency that books many prominent rap acts, I asked him if booking agents had responded to venue bans on rap music by leveling charges of racial discrimination against venue owners. His answer clearly illustrates the significance of the institutional power at stake:

These facilities are privately owned, they can do anything they want. You say to them: "You won't let us in because you're discriminating against black kids." They say to you, "Fuck you, who cares. Do whatever you got to do, but you're not coming in here. You, I don't need you, I don't want you. Don't come, don't bother me. I will book hockey, ice shows, basketball, country music and graduations. I will do all kinds of things 360 days out of the year. But I don't need you. I don't need fighting, shootings and stabbings." Why do they care? They have their image to maintain.¹³

Richard's imaginary conversation with a venue owner is a pointed description of the

scope of power these owners have over access to large public urban spaces and the racially exclusionary silent policy that governs booking policies. . . .

Because rap has an especially strong urban metropolitan following, freezing it out of these major metropolitan arenas has a dramatic impact on rappers' ability to reach their fan base in live performance. Public Enemy, Queen Latifah, and other rap groups use live performance settings to address current social issues, media miscoverage, and other problems that especially concern black America. For example, during a December 1988 concert in Providence, R.I., Chuck D from Public Enemy explained that the Boston arena refused to book the show and read from a *Boston Herald* article that depicted rap fans as a problematic element and that gave its approval of the banning of the show. To make up for this rejection, Chuck D called out to the "Roxbury crowd in the house," to make them feel at home in Providence. Each time Chuck mentioned Roxbury, sections of the arena erupted in especially exuberant shouts and screams.¹⁴ Because black youths are constructed as a permanent threat to social order, large public gatherings will always be viewed as dangerous events. The larger arenas possess greater potential for mass access and unsanctioned behavior. And black youths, who are highly conscious of their alienated and marginalized lives, will continue to be hostile toward those institutions and environments that reaffirm this aspect of their reality.

The presence of a predominantly black audience in a 15,000 capacity arena, communicating with major black cultural icons whose music, lyrics, and attitude illuminate and affirm black fears and grievances, provokes a fear of the consolidation of black rage. Venue owner and insurance company anxiety over broken chairs, insurance claims, or fatalities are not important in and of themselves, they are important because they symbolize a loss of control that might involve challenges to the current social configuration. They suggest the possibility that

black rage can be directed at the people and institutions that support the containment and oppression of black people. As West Coast rapper Ice Cube points out in *The Nigga Ya Love to Hate*, "Just think if niggas decided to retaliate?"¹⁵

. . . Deconstructing the media's ideological perspective on black crime does not suggest that real acts of violence by and against black youths do not take place. However, real acts are not accessible to us without critical mediation by hegemonic discourses. Consequently, this "real" violence is always/already positioned as a part of images of black violence and within the larger discourse on the urban black threat. Although violence at rap concerts can be understood as a visible instance of crimes by and against blacks, because it takes place in a white safety zone, it is interpreted as a loss of control on home territory. The fact that rap-related concert violence takes place outside the invisible fence that surrounds black poor communities raises the threat factor. Rappers have rearticulated a longstanding awareness among African Americans that crimes against blacks (especially black-on-black crimes) do not carry equal moral weight or political imperative.

. . . The media's repetition of rap-related violence and the urban problematic that it conjures are not limited to the crime blotters, they also inform live performance critiques. In both contexts, the assumption is that what makes rap newsworthy is its spatial and cultural disruption, not its musical innovation and expressive capacity.¹⁶ Consequently, dominant media critiques of rap's sounds and styles are necessarily conditioned by the omnipresent fears of black influence, fears of a black aesthetic planet.

In a particularly hostile *Los Angeles Times* review of the Public Enemy 1990 summer tour at the San Diego Sports Arena, John D'Agostino articulates a complex microcosm of social anxieties concerning black youths, black aesthetics, and rap music. D'Agostino's extended next-day rock review column entitled: "Rap Concert Fails to Sizzle in San Diego" features a

prominent sidebar that reads: "Although it included a brawl, the Sports Arena concert seemed to lack steam and could not keep the under-sized capacity audience energized." In the opening sentence, he confesses that "rap is not a critics' music; it is a disciples' music," a confession that hints at his cultural illiteracy and should be enough to render his subsequent critique irrelevant. What music is for critics? To which critics is he referring? Evidently, critical reviews of rap music in *The Source* and the *Village Voice* are written by disciples. D'Agostino's opening paragraph presents the concert audience as mindless and dangerous religious followers, mesmerized by rap's rhythms:

For almost five hours, devotees of the Afros, Queen Latifah, Kid 'N Play, Digital Underground, Big Daddy Kane and headliners Public Enemy were jerked into spasmodic movement by what seemed little more than intermittent segments of a single rhythmic continuum. It was hypnotic in the way of sensory deprivation, a mind- and body-numbing marathon of monotony whose deafening, prerecorded drum and bass tracks and roving klieg lights frequently turned the audience of 6,500 into a single-minded moveable beast. Funk meets Nuremberg Rally.¹⁷

Apparently, the music is completely unintelligible to him, and his inability to interpret the sounds frightens him. His reading, which makes explicit his fear and ignorance, condemns rap precisely on the grounds that make it compelling. For example, because he cannot explain why a series of bass or drum lines moves the crowd, the audience seems "jerked into spasmodic movement," clearly suggesting an "automatic" or "involuntary" response to the music. The coded familiarity of the rhythms and hooks that rap samples from other black music, especially funk and soul music, carries with it the power of black

collective memory. These sounds are cultural markers, and responses to them are not involuntary at all but in fact densely and actively intertextual; they immediately conjure collective black experience, past and present.¹⁸ He senses the rhythmic continuum but interprets it as "monotonous and mind- and body-numbing." The very pulse that fortified the audience in San Diego, left him feeling "sensory deprived." The rhythms that empowered and stimulated the crowd, numbed his body and mind.

His description of the music as "numbing" and yet capable of moving the crowd as a "single-minded, moveable beast" captures his confusion and anxiety regarding the power and meaning of the drums. What appeared "monotonous" frightened him precisely because that same pulse energized and empowered the audience. Unable to negotiate the relationship between his fear of the audience and the wall of sound that supported black pleasure while it pushed him to the margins, D'Agostino interprets black pleasure as dangerous and automatic. As his representation of the concert aura regressed, mindless religious rap disciples no longer provided a sufficient metaphor. The hegemonic ideology to which D'Agostino's article subscribes was displaced by the sense of community facilitated by rap music as well as the black aesthetics the music privileged.¹⁹ He ends his introduction by linking funk music to an actual Nazi rally to produce the ultimate depiction of black youths as an aggressive, dangerous, racist element whose behavior is sick, inexplicable, and orchestrated by rappers (that is, rally organizers). Rap, he ultimately suggests, is a disciples' soundtrack for the celebration of black fascist domination. The concert that "failed to sizzle" was in fact too hot to handle.

Once his construction of black fascism is in place, D'Agostino devotes the bulk of his review to the performances, describing them as "juvenile," "puerile," and, in the case of Public Enemy, one that "relies on controversy to maintain interest." Halfway through the review, he describes the

"brawl" that followed Digital Underground's performance:

After the house lights were brought up following DU's exit, a fight broke out in front of the stage. Security guards, members of various rappers' entourages, and fans joined in the fray that grew to mob size and then pushed into a corner of the floor at one side of the stage. People rushed the area from all parts of the arena, but the scrappers were so tightly balled together that few serious punches could be thrown, and, in a few minutes, a tussle that threatened to become a small scale riot instead lost steam.²⁰

From my mezzanine-level stage side seat, which had a clear view of the stage, this "brawl" looked like nothing more than a small-scale scuffle. Fans did not rush from all areas to participate in the fight, which was easily contained, as he himself points out, in a few minutes. In fact, few people responded to the fight except by watching silently until the fracas fizzled out. He neglects to consider that the 20-plus minute waiting periods *between each act* and the overarching sense of disrespect with which young black fans are treated might have contributed to the frustration. Out of 6,500 people, a group of no more than 20, who were quickly surrounded by security guards, falls significantly short of a "mob" and "threatened to become a small scale riot" only in D'Agostino's colonial imagination.

D'Agostino's review closes by suggesting that rap is fizzling out, that juvenile antics and staged controversy no longer hold the audience's attention and therefore signify the death of rap music. What happened to the "single-minded moveable beast" that reared its ugly head in the introduction? How did black fascism dissolve into harmless puerility in less than five hours? D'Agostino had to make that move; his distaste for rap music, coupled with his fear of black youths, left him little alternative but to slay the single-minded beast by

disconnecting its power source. His review sustains a fear of black energy and passion and at the same time allays these fears by suggesting that rap is dying. The imminent death of rap music is a dominant myth that deliberately misconstrues black rage as juvenile rebellion and at the same time retains the necessary specter of black violence, justifying the social repression of rap music and black youths. . . .

Rap music is fundamentally linked to larger social constructions of black culture as an internal threat to dominant American culture and social order. Rap's capacity as a form of testimony, as an articulation of a young black urban critical voice of social protest, has profound potential as a basis for a language of liberation.²¹ Contestation over the meaning and significance of rap music and its ability to occupy public space and retain expressive freedom constitutes a central aspect of contemporary black cultural politics.

During the centuries-long period of Western slavery, there were elaborate rules and laws designed to control slave populations. Constraining the mobility of slaves, especially at night and in groups, was of special concern; slave masters reasoned that revolts could be organized by blacks who moved too freely and without surveillance.²² Slave masters were rightfully confident that blacks had good reason to escape, revolt, and retaliate. Contemporary laws and practices curtailing and constraining black mobility in urban America function in much the same way and for similar reasons. Large groups of African Americans, especially teenagers, represent a threat to the social order of oppression. Albeit more sophisticated and more difficult to trace, contemporary policing of African Americans resonates with the legacy of slavery.

Rap's poetic voice is deeply political in content and spirit, but rap's hidden struggle, the struggle over access to public space, community resources, and the interpretation of black expression, constitutes rap's hidden politics.

♦ Notes

1. At a 1988 rap concert in New Haven, Connecticut, a young African American male protested the weapon search shouting, "Fuck it! I'm not going through the search." But after a short protest, realizing that he would have to forfeit his ticket, he entered the lines and proceeded through the search station. In the summer of 1990, outside the San Diego Sports Arena, a young woman wanted to go inside to see if her friend had already arrived and was waiting inside, but she said that she would rather wait outside a bit longer instead of having to go through the search twice if it turned out that her friend was not in fact inside.
2. Public space discrimination and the public injury to dignity it creates is not limited to black teenagers. Feagin's "Continuing Significance of Race" illustrates that in post-Civil Rights America, discriminatory practices against blacks of all ages and classes remain a significant part of public space interaction with whites. He points out a number of critical public spaces in which black men and women are likely to be humiliated and discriminated against. His findings are in keeping with my experiences and observations and the context within which they took place.
3. Dave Marsh and Phyllis Pollack, "Wanted for Attitude," *Village Voice*, 10 October 1989, pp. 33-37.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-37.
5. See Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, CT: University Press of New England, 1993). See also Marsh and Pollack, "Wanted," and *Rock and Roll Confidential* (RRC), especially their special pamphlet "You've Got a Right to Rock: Don't Let Them Take It Away." This pamphlet is a detailed documentation of the censorship movements and their institutional bases and attacks. The RRC is edited by David Marsh and can be subscribed to by writing to RRC, Dept. 7, Box 341305, Los Angeles, CA 90034. See also Linda Martin and Kerry Seagrave, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1988).
6. In fact, the attacks on earlier popular black expressions such as jazz and rock 'n' roll were grounded in fears that white youths were deriving too much pleasure from black expressions and that these primitive, alien expressions were dangerous to their moral development. See Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay* (Chicago: Nelson, 1979); Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*; Jones, *Blues People*; Ogren, *Jazz Revolution*; Lipsitz, *Time Passages*.
7. Cited in Light, "Ice-T."
8. See Messerschmidt, "Capitalism," especially Chapter 3, "Powerless Men and Street Crime." Messerschmidt notes that "public perception of what serious violent crime is—and who the violent criminals are—is determined first by what the state defines as violent and the types of violence it overlooks. . . . The criminal law defines only certain kinds of violence as criminal—namely, one-on-one forms of murder, assault, and robbery, which are the types of violence young marginalized minority males primarily engage in. The criminal law excludes certain types of avoidable killings, injuries, and thefts engaged in by powerful white males, such as maintaining hazardous working conditions or producing unsafe products" (p. 52).
9. Mark Kruggel and Jerry Roga, "L. I. Rap Slayer Sought," *New York Daily News*, 12 September 1988, p. 3; David Gates et al., "The Rap Attitude," *Newsweek*, 19 March 1990, pp. 56-63.
10. Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 19.
11. Interview with "Richard," a talent agency representative from a major agency that represents dozens of major rap groups, October 1990.
12. Paul Chevigny, *Gigs: Jazz and the Cabaret Laws in New York City* (London: Routledge, 1991). See also Ogren, *Jazz Revolution*.
13. Rose interview with "Richard." I have decided not to reveal the identity of this talent agency representative, because it serves no particular purpose here and may have a detrimental effect on his employment.
14. Roxbury is a poor, predominantly black area in Boston.

15. Ice Cube, "The Nigga Ya Love to Hate," *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* (Priority Records, 1990).

16. See especially David Samuel, "The Real Face of Rap," *The New Republic*, 11 November 1991, and Gates et al., "The Rap Attitude." In contrast, Jon Parales and Peter Watrous, the primary popular music critics for the *New York Times*, have made noteworthy attempts to offer complex and interesting critiques of rap music. In many cases, a significant number of letters to the editor appeared in following weeks complaining about the appearance and content of their reviews and articles.

17. John D'Agostino, "Rap Concert Fails to Sizzle in San Diego," *Los Angeles Times* (San Diego edition), 28 August 1990, pp. F1, F5. This review is accompanied by subsequent short articles about charges brought against rappers for "obscene conduct" while on stage—fully clothed—during this concert and the massive coverage of the 2 Live Crew controversy regarding obscene lyrics. For example, Michael Granberry, "Digital Underground May Face Prosecution," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 November 1990, p. F9; "2 Rap Beat, Must Beat Rap," *New York Daily News*, 4 August 1990, p. 3. It is also

quite important to point out how much D'Agostino's description of rap music is modeled after arguments made by T. W. Adorno regarding jazz music in the 1940s. In "On Popular Music," Adorno refers to rhythms in jazz as a sign of obedience to domination of the machine age: "The cult of the machine which is represented by unabating jazz beats involves a self-renunciation that cannot but take root in the form of a fluctuating uneasiness somewhere in the personality of the obedient." See Frith and Goodwin, eds., *On Record*, p. 313.

18. See Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, for an extended analysis of this process.

19. See Ray Pratt, "Popular Music, Free Space, and the Quest for Community," *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 13 no. 4, 59-76, 1989, on the question of public space moments of community experiences, and see Snead, "On Repetition."

20. D'Agostino, "Rap Concert," p. F5.

21. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End, 1990).

22. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966).