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RAPITALISM

by

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B.S. University of Washington, 2003

A thesis proposal submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

My paper questions the degree to which the hip hop subculture is oppositional to mainstream American society and its ideals. Toward that end, I examine the structure of the hip hop industry and its subculture. While the hip hop subculture in America consistently has projected images of rebellion and resistance to many of the mores, constraints and values of dominant society, the actual structure and organization of the hip hop subculture have mirrored, supported and promoted the values of the dominant culture in the United States. I begin by examining the structure of the main elements of the hip hop subculture: deejaying, breakdancing, emceeing and graffiti art, and the practices within each to demonstrate that the hip hop subculture has a structure which supports capitalistic practices. The interactions between hip hop industry participants, their fans, and the marketplace are an embracing of the values of mainstream American society and capitalism. From its inception, the structure of the hip hop subculture and the actions of the artists within the structure essentially has made hip hop music capitalism set to a beat.

Dedicated to my parents, William David Smith and Elizabeth Smith

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Hip Hop culture appears to be in opposition to mainstream American society and its ideals. Hip Hop seems to pride itself on being an oppositional, resistant subculture, but is that only on the surface? This paper will investigate the way hip hop functions as a culture to examine the degree to which it challenges or embraces the values of corporate America. Rap is the music genre that appears to have emerged with a significant number of characteristics of capitalist organization integrated within it. The interactions between hip hop industry participants, fans and the marketplace are an embracing of the values of mainstream American society and capitalism. The practices within each of the four elements of the hip hop culture: deejaying, breakdancing, emceeing and graffiti art reveal that the hip hop subculture is organized in a way that helps it support capitalistic practices and adoption. From its beginnings in dilapidated neighborhoods of New York, the structure of the hip hop culture and the actions of the artists that perform and interact within this structure have essentially made hip hop music the equivalent of capitalism set to a beat.

This paper proposes that the structure of the hip hop subculture closely mimics capitalism. Capitalism is a socioeconomic system characterized by many elements, therefore the focus will be on the elements of capitalism that hip hop structure models. Perhaps one of the most identifiable characteristic of capitalism as an economic system is the generation and use of capital itself. In a capitalistic system, businesses typically generate a profit and subsequently reinvest this capital back into the business. Widespread in capitalism, this process spurs economic growth and the expansion of business. In socioeconomic systems like socialism and communism, typically the economy and business outcomes are planned to an extent and there is

extensive government control. In contrast, capitalist economies have comparatively minimized government control over the economy and society. In capitalism, the economic outcomes of the social system are not controlled or directed by any ruling entity in the structure. Though there is some market intervention by the government through regulations, laws and measures of control like the power to set interest rates, firms compete directly against one another for consumers and resources using marketing, advertising and joint ventures. These properties, typical of capitalism are also evident in hip hop.

The processes and internal mechanisms of capitalism grow increasingly more detailed over time and complex systems of support emerge. Though a complete description of capitalism and capitalistic theory is beyond the scope of this paper, I aim to focus on the examination of the characteristics of hip hop that mirror those in capitalism. While some forms of capitalistic elements are sure to be present in any activity practiced in late capitalistic societies, the irony of hip hop's presence in the marketplace is its vivid presentation as being the voice of those on the margins, those who are "America's worst nightmare" and of groups who purport to be outside of the capitalist mainstream and stridently against dominant and mainstream ideology.

I will use critical theory analyze hip hop culture and examine how it functions in larger society and the culture industries. I examine the structure and culture of the hip hop industry to explore its connection and interaction with capitalism. While the hip hop culture in America often projects images of rebellion and resistance to many of the values of dominant society and the mainstream, the actual structure and organization of the hip hop subculture has paralleled, supported and even promoted the values of dominant society in America. Chapter two will present the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. In this chapter I will discuss the history of critical theory and how it has been used to study the systems and elements of popular culture. In

chapter three I explore the colorful history and main elements of the hip hop culture. Chapter four then uses elements of critical theory for an analysis of the structure of hip hop culture to demonstrate how it is one that is organized in such a way that it operates in a manner similar to capitalism. My analysis argues that hip hop has within it systems that function like those within capitalism. As a genre it supports entities that function like entrepreneurs, businesses, and corporations with competition and collaboration between them. Perhaps most importantly, hip hop seems to contain one of capitalism's foundational facets, a growth element. In chapter five I review the elements of hip hop and offer concluding ideas based on the discussion in the chapters that precede it. I examine how one element appears to have achieved prominence while the other parts either essentially died out from obsolescence or moved from potential staples of pop culture to high culture. I offer related conclusions and provide directions for future research and investigation based on the evidence provided by this thesis.

This paper is a theoretical thesis and as such is intended as an exploration of subject matter that will produce ideas for future research topics. It is intended as an exploratory paper and not a definitive statement. Previous theory-based examinations of hip hop have neglected to fully examine its capitalistic properties. Through this analysis I intend to argue that the many capitalistic characteristics of the hip hop culture are almost direct analogues of the components of capitalism, and that the level of capitalistic analogue present in elements of hip hop resulted in the eventual rise or decline of that element.

CHAPTER TWO: REMIXING MARX AND RESEARCHING RAP

In this paper I use Critical theory to analyze hip hop music and culture in American society. Social Exchange theory, Rational Choice theory and Symbolic Interactionism offered the chance to look at the interactions and power relations between persons, yet Critical theory offered a more organizational analysis that provided superior insights to explain hip hop's position in society. With Phenomenology I did not see a reasonable way to study the unique structural aspects of hip hop in the way Critical theory allows. Feminist theory provides many insights into popular and male-dominated cultures like hip hop, but ultimately Critical theory proves more effective in predicting the dilemmas faced in hip hop culture and its relationship with dominant society. Social Contract theory and Structural Functionalism would allow me to look at group interactions in society, but Critical theory offers a specific focus on popular and mass culture. To study hip hop culture and influence in America, I will use the theories of the Critical (Frankfurt) School.

The Frankfurt School Steps to the Mic

The Frankfurt school, where critical theory emerged, was established in the early 1920's. By the beginning of the 20th century, theorist Karl Marx had gained many followers with his historical materialistic concepts and writing. Marx's historical or dialectical materialism is the idea that the creation and reproduction of society is rooted in control and dispute over the means of production in society (Marx and Engels 1998). Marx set up a dialectic of opposing interests

that he felt were collectively responsible for the state of society. These two elements were the ruling class and the working class. He termed the ruling or elite capitalist class the bourgeoisie and argued that they in control of the means of production in capitalist society. Though members of this business class compete against one another in society, this class has shared class interests against other classes. It is made up of corporate leaders, business executives and private property owners. The working or ruled class, termed the proletariat, must sell its labor to survive. This class is comprised by those in entry-level and menial jobs but includes those who do not own the means of production and as a result, work for those who do. As members of the proletariat sell their labor to business owners for less than it is worth, gain no equity by renting property from land owners and participate in other lopsided situations that favor the interests of the capitalists, they earn wealth for the bourgeoisie. The ruled class also has shared interests in Marx's (1998) conceptualization. Thus these two groups served as thesis and antithesis and the resulting synthesis was the production of society itself. The battle between the competing interests resulted in strife and conflict, but often compromises as well. Marx (1998) believed that the unique aspects found in the structure of the ruling class would ultimately lead to a successful working class revolution against it. He explains this in his seminal work *The Communist Manifesto*:

But they never cease, for a single instant, to instill into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in order that the German workers may straightway use, as so many weapons against the bourgeoisie, the social and political conditions that the bourgeoisie must necessarily introduce along with its supremacy, and in order that, after the fall of the reactionary classes in Germany, the fight against the bourgeoisie itself may immediately begin.

(p. 90)

Marx was a follower of Georg Hegel and his historical materialistic ideas constituted a redirection of Hegel's dialectical ideas about the nature of truth and reality. In *The Science of Logic* Hegel had proposed a dialectical idealism with essence as one factor and existence as the other, their interaction leading to actuality or truth itself (Hegel 1989).

One event that would ultimately help to spur the formation of the Frankfurt school was when the revolution Marx predicted did not take place when conditions seemed ripe for it to occur. Magee's (1997) presentation explains that as Marx's theories came into question during periods of conflict during World War I and II, his followers split because of their resulting differing beliefs about the continued utility of related Marxist theory. Many Marxists were disillusioned when revolution did not occur as they believed it would. Others thought that Marxism remained useful even after it was seemingly shown to be incorrect, but felt it would need to be adjusted and continually evaluated (Magee 1997). With these conditions in place in 1924, Marxist Felix J. Weil founded the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in Germany. Subsequently, the newly created institute began enlisting the services of these followers. As a collective they sought to critically analyze society and capitalism. Instead of disregarding or abandoning Marxist philosophy as some had done, they decided to use a reformed Marxist theory that would be consistently re-evaluated. The institute's director published an essay detailing the ineffectiveness of traditional theory, calling for a theory that was more critical of the established society. Thus the Frankfurt school also came to be known as the Critical School.

In 1934 the Nazi regime began to seize Germany. Because of the threat of danger, the institute was moved overseas from Frankfurt and re-established at Columbia University. It was there that the school would grow and produce much of its work.

Theorists Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin are among the prominent members of the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School became a respected source of criticism of popular culture criticism and it has an extended history that is generally split into dual generations of scholars.

One of the early or first generation writers from the Critical school to critique mass culture in detail was Leo Lowenthal, who joined the Institute for Social Research shortly after it was founded. When the institute was based on Germany, Lowenthal was the last member of the Institute to leave on March 2nd, 1933 (Lowenthal 1987). Only three days later, Nazi storm troops occupied the building it was in. Lowenthal had escaped the danger and he would go on to produce important writing for the school. In a chapter titled “Historical Perspectives on Popular Culture”, Lowenthal details the opposing ideas that emerge when the effect of mass culture and society is examined (Bronner and Kellner 1989). He also compares the variations of the aims of sociological criticism of mass culture, favoring social research that doesn’t shy away from value judgements of the society it describes over social research that merely describes the existing system.

Lowenthal was perhaps one of the first prominent theorists at the Frankfurt School, while noted critical theorist Herbert Marcuse emerged later. Marcuse (1964) presents the culture industry (as termed by Adorno and Horkheimer), as an oppressive and entrenched societal machine. In *One Dimensional Man* Marcuse views popular culture entities as creating false needs such as the need to “relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements” (Marcuse 1964:5). He also asserts that these needs or values become internalized but ultimately are still the work of the dominant society and its views. Marcuse argues that dominant society and culture accomplishes its goal by preconditioning members of

all classes of society to have essentially similar needs, wants and purchasing goals. He supposes that this system is so effective that dissent is reduced to proposing oppositional ideas within the existing social system, as opposed to truly challenging the social system itself.

Marcuse's evaluation of society characterizes the typical citizen as one inundated with the ideals created and perpetuated by society, so that even someone's impulses are an attempt to seek the path that the culture industry has set out for the person long in advance. Marcuse (1964) also theorizes that after the gap between art forms and societal reality is closed, capitalistic society continually coordinates more and more effectively so that artistic products are woven into the fabric of society in any place, effectively negating any attempt at subversion. Though hip hop's takeover by corporate culture industry forces is thus predicted, hip hop culture presents itself as being in opposition to these forces, and thrives off of this.

In *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse (1969) offers an examination of art and Black music, saying both have fallen prey to what he terms desublimation. Marcuse's conception of desublimation is the process by which accepted forms of expression change from forms that are considered more sophisticated to those that are simpler and at more of a base level. This type of scholarship is emblematic of what the critical school offered in the way of theory.

Members of the critical school also discuss other elements of the culture industry that they view as problematic. Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (Benjamin 1968) is an extensive examination of what he feels is the loss of originality in art due to sophisticated methods of copying that emerge in advanced capitalism. Benjamin argues that the authenticity of a work of art lies in its aura, which rests in the tradition and ritual it was created in. Once technology reaches a stage where many copies can be easily made of a work of art and the copies are identical to the original, authenticity loses meaning

(1968). Benjamin's theory is a critical analysis of the effect the capitalist mainstream and mass culture can have on human behavior and perceptions.

Another Frankfurt School critique of mainstream culture and the machinery behind it was written by critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Adorno was considered a genius by fellow critical theorist Leo Lowenthal (Lowenthal 1987). Having grown up in Frankfurt in a house full of music and musicians, Adorno earned his doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Frankfurt in 1925. Almost six years later he met Horkheimer who was the director of the Institute for Social Research at that time (Gale 2003). In 1937 Horkheimer wrote the essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" in which he'd attempted to set a course for critical theory that would distinguish it from traditional theory. In the essay he argued that traditional theory was isolated, fragmented and ultimately not useful for anything more than serving dominant culture. Horkheimer (1937) wanted critical theory to take a broader view of society to be able to thoroughly analyze the social order. Together, Adorno and Horkheimer published their book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The book looks at the way the dominant society controls and warps every aspect of culture. They theorize that in advanced capitalistic societies, a single dominant culture emerges thanks to factors like mass production, concentration of power and technological tools. The result is that this form of industry not only controls culture but actually creates it. What it creates with its dominating influence is a culture that is primarily concerned with predictability of resources, supplies and society in general, control over the social and economic structure, and reproduction of itself.

These ideas would later be discussed by another thinker from the critical school. Jurgen Habermas is considered the principal author of the second generation of the Critical School scholars (Greenberg and Martin 2001). In his book *On Society and Politics*, Habermas puts forth

many of these discussions regarding mass society and culture put forth by his fellow critical school theorists and he endeavors to advance the ideas with further analysis and examination. Habermas decided that categorizing the culture industry as unified and one-sided monolith eliminated the presence of discord that he believed rested within the social system (Seidman 1989). He felt the structure itself was indeed a controlling one, but also had built-in spaces for resistance of the structure: “There is a counterweight of emancipatory potential built into communication structures themselves” (Seidman 1989:91). This was Habermas’ way of injecting a human element of uncertainty into the transformed Marxist theory of the critical school. While the culture industry possesses great power and great reach, Habermas added in the possibility of people objecting and purposely using this power against the system that possesses it. Though the mass communication of the culture industry is ubiquitous and influential, distributed in unrelenting manner, Habermas reasoned “These communications cannot be reliably shielded from the possibility of opposition by responsible actors” (Seidman 1989:91). While hip hop certainly has had opportunities to occupy these protest spaces, the hip hop industry and culture has not done so by and large.

Extending the discussion from the structural openings in mass culture and society for protest and subversion, Habermas also writes about the characteristics of prominent systems of resistance and which are equipped to truly oppose the social system (Seidman 1989). Deeming this distinction the difference between potentials for resistance and withdrawal and emancipatory potentials, he decides that feminism is the only resistance movement that possesses the latter.

The struggle against patriarchal oppression and for the redemption of a promise that has long been anchored in the acknowledged universalistic foundations of morality and law

gives feminism the impetus of an offensive movement, whereas the other movements have a more defensive character. (p. 92)

Habermas is a contemporary writer in the critical school tradition, reworking Marxist theory to refine and further develop it as a tool with which to critique society. The work of the Critical school has provided numerous ideas and theoretical perspectives with which to discern the nature of hip hop culture's interaction with dominant culture in America.

New School Mashups and Mixes

Other social research has used the theories of the critical school to analyze popular culture. Firth (1978) used Adorno and Benjamin in his examination of the sociology of rock music. Firth critiqued Adorno's characterizations of mass culture as an indictment of popular culture, even as he respected its depth and thoroughness. As Firth's examination of mass culture in *The Sociology of Rock* begins to culminate, he asserts that rock musicians face a dilemma between either being considered artistic geniuses or producing easily consumable material that the public wants (Frith 1978). He cites Robert Levin in advancing the idea that rock music became superior to other popular music forms because essentially it became the soundtrack for a period of time in which there was heightened consciousness and social awareness. I suggest that rap's popularity is in part because its structure has allowed it to become the soundtrack not just for a specific period of time in capitalist society, but for the underlying economic structure that exists at any time in a capitalist America.

Martinez (1997) considered rap music as a part of oppositional culture, incorporating the ideas of Marcuse, Adorno and Benjamin. She agrees with Firth in refusing to completely side with Adorno and dismiss the culture industries and big business as useless. She also echoes Habermas' (Seidman 1989) idea that there are built-in places for resistance within popular culture.

Potter (1995) used Benjamin's ideas about the loss of authenticity that comes with mechanical reproduction. Potter lamented the inability of consumers to correctly identify authentic cultural products from other genres that were being labeled as hip hop when hip hop appropriated them. He blamed this on the reproducibility of a record. While he accurately locates an issue of concern at the locus of the exporting of the hip hop culture outside of it, a more specific issue exists that critical school theorists foresaw. The reproducibility of samples, which the hip hop genre increasingly relies on, renders the sample sources simultaneously known but unidentified as original pieces of art.

M. Elizabeth Blair (1993) used Adorno's ideas about operations within the culture industry in an examination of the process of the commercialization of the hip hop subculture. Blair (1993:22) wonders: "How does a subcultural phenomenon such as rap become integrated into the mainstream of mass culture?" She goes on to compare rap culture to other folk cultures like heavy metal and punk. She provides an explanation that is rooted in theories of how hegemony operates, for the adoption of these folk cultures by mainstream culture. Blair's focus is largely ideological and though she describes how well rap culture meshes with capitalistic society, her analysis misses identifying the many capitalistic qualities of rap and linking them with rap's rise.

The commercialization of rap and the changing structure of the hip hop subculture have also been investigated (Neal 1999), but the analysis neglected to fully explore how capitalistic elements in the structure of hip hop were related to the process. Rose (1994) stresses that rap was always commercialized and that the major shift was not from some form of not for profit authenticity to commercialization, but instead control of rap changed from the hands of hip hop practitioners to corporations. The structure of the music industry as a whole and its effect on musical innovation and diversity was researched by Peterson & Bender (1975), but the article was primarily descriptive and predated the rise of hip hop. Other works examine the structure of the hip hop subculture and its evolution (Neate 2004; Potter 1995) but do not fully consider the subject I intend to investigate.

Maher (2005) examines how mix tapes function in the hip hop music industry. He highlights them as an alternate type of democratization, a way for self-production to enable any artist to in effect start their business cheaply. Rose (1991) examined the interplay between hip hop's fans and artists, who accept being labeled by mainstream forces as outsiders, and the larger context of the hip hop industry and how it is defined politically. Binder (1993) compared the societal reactions to rap music versus heavy metal and theorized that it was the characteristics of the hip hop structure – the fact that most of its practitioners are Black – that caused a disparity in how dangerous each type of music was considered when protests emerged. Race is a significant part of the discussion about hip hop's attempts to be a resistant subculture, but the extensive analysis that would be required to properly address the issue is beyond the scope of this paper. While hip hop is considered a Black art form and its practitioners and participants are largely from non-white communities, my focus is on the structure within hip hop. The Critical School did not publish any extensive examinations of popular culture and race. A discussion here would

primarily serve to initiate a larger discussion of race in society, and would divert the focus off of the critical school and a structural analysis of hip hop and capitalism.

Research by Dimitriadis (1996) studied the appropriation of rap by the culture industry and the resulting change in its structure. Initially, hip hop was a communal art form with embedded elements. Once the music was split from the other elements and reproduced using technology that emerged such as vinyl, CD's and mp3's, hip hop was turned into a westernized, individualized art form. Shusterman (1991) and Watkins (2004) surmise instead that rap took advantage of technology in advancing itself. Boyd (1997) analyzes the political content in rap and decides that the structure of the hip hop subculture is co-opted by its financial dependence on the culture industry. Ultimately Boyd documents how any movement to subvert dominant culture and its ideas have fallen away in favor of elements of rap that sell best for the culture industry. Lusane (2004) comes to a similar conclusion, that any success rap artists have in subverting the dominant economic culture are overshadowed by their integration in the oppressive culture industry. Even as this has occurred, Negus (1999) documented how figures in rap were accepted into the corporate world of the music industry on a level beneath their counterparts in other genres, or not at all. Time magazine (2005) did a feature on hip hop's structure illustrating the interlocking nature of rap's most prominent artists. The article illustrates many links between them whether they were gangsta rappers, conscious, party types or used any number of themes.

Mark Anthony Neal (2004) chronicles and decries the changes from previously political hip hop acts to artists and groups that position themselves as political and subversive, though they actually embrace the mainstream culture and reproduce and enhance traditional economic models and systems. Martinez (1997) argues that hip hop is an oppositional subculture but the

themes and representative lyrics that form the basis of the contention are not only a small percentage of most of the referenced artists' lyrics, the artists' presence in the marketplace bolstered the dominant culture and therefore its ideals far more than it ever subverted it. Neal (1999) examines the commodification of hip hop and surmises that although it presents itself as oppositional, it essentially embraces mainstream values (George 1999).

Theorists have also examined the various strategies hip hop artists use. Negus (1999) looked at how rap artists explicitly talk about their commercial strategies and business plans in trade magazines like *Billboard*. He also theorized, in the vein of Adorno and Horkheimer that "entertainment corporations set up structures of organization and working practices to produce identifiable products and 'intellectual properties'" (Negus 1999:490). Hess (2005) documented the strategies hip hop artists use to maintain an authentic identity and artistic credibility within hip hop. Others have done examinations of the latent purposes of language used in rap music (Kopano 2002), and entrepreneurship in rap (Basu and Werbner 2001). While these articles delve into varying facets of the interaction between capitalistic systems, mainstream culture and hip hop, they lack the presence of an evaluation or detailed description of the many elements of capitalism present in the elements that comprise hip hop. Furthermore the literature is absent of a discussion of how these elements led one element of the four to flourish while the others languished and largely faded.

My thesis combines the theories of the critical school and integrates an analysis of the many capitalistic features of hip hop structure, practices, language and politics to examine the extent of the hip hop subculture's oppositional nature. There are numerous descriptions of hip hop culture (Banes 1981; Castleman 2004; Chang 2005; Fernando Jr. 1999; Flores 1987; Fricke 2002; Jenkins 1999) and applications of theory to popular and hip hop culture (Berger 1975;

Blair 1993; Bronner and Kellner 1989; Ewen 1976; Ewen 1982; Frith 1978; Hess 2005; Lusane 2004; Maher 2005; Peterson and Berger 1975; Potter 1995; Rose 1991; Shusterman 1991; Watkins 2004), but these examinations fail to discuss the interconnections between the abundance of capitalistic elements in hip hop, the genre's positioning in the marketplace, and the theories of the Critical School.

“I’ve Come to Show a Different View”: My Contribution

My thesis looks at the properties of hip hop culture and argues that the presence of capitalistic characteristics found in certain elements within it are related to the prominence and success of some parts of hip hop culture. Previous works have described some of the characteristics of parts of hip hop, but neglected to consider their connection with capitalism or place in hip hop's presence in the culture industry and dominant society. I use the theories of the Critical school to show that even though hip hop presents itself as a culture oppositional to the mainstream, it is in fact quite aligned with it. In fact I argue that hip hop functions at dual extremes. It is perhaps positioned as the music genre most outside the mainstream; violent, rebellious and dangerous to the point of actual fear is felt by mainstream society whether it is a hip hop related record or performer away from the studio.

Simultaneously I assert that it functions at the extreme end of capitalism. My thesis intends to show that it is a music culture and genre that is heavily aligned with the capitalist mainstream in America. The properties in the structure of the rap element of hip hop are

supremely capitalistic while simultaneously hip hop as a whole presents itself as being against the mainstream.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF HIP HOP

Hip Hop began in New York City in the 1970's (Fricke 2002; Rose 1994). Hip Hop culture consists of four elements or activities: deejaying, graffiti art, breakdancing and emceeing or rapping. These activities and practices seemed to emerge together during the period between 1975 and 1979, without any of the elements necessarily predating the others. Born of African rhetorical tradition (Jenkins 1999; Kopano 2002) and shaped through American slavery (Pinn 2003) it emerged in the South Bronx amidst gang culture and abject poverty. Residents of this area that birthed hip hop felt abandoned by mainstream America (Chang 2005). Rose (1994) emphasizes the idea that the poverty, abandonment and disrespect South Bronx occupants felt in a post-industrial city played a crucial role in the formation of hip hop, and specifically the rap element of it. She is careful to make it clear that rap's emergence was not only an extension of African tradition, but a product of this environment as well: "Rap's primary context for development is hip hop culture, the Afrodiasporic traditions it extends and revises, *and* the New York urban terrain in the 1970's" (1994:26). Richie "Crazy Legs" Colon of the Pioneering break dancing group "Rock Steady" highlights economic scarcity as a factor in how the culture spread: "A lot of these people didn't really have the money to join a community center around the way as far as baseball, softball, boxing, or things like that" (Fernando Jr. 1999).

In these hostile and desperate conditions, hip hop began as a folk culture. In *The Sociology of Rock*, Simon Firth describes folk culture:

Folk culture is created directly and spontaneously out of communal experience; it is the culture of the working classes, it expresses the communal experience of work; there is no

distance between folk artists and audience, no separation between folk production and consumption. (p. 197)

When it first began to form, hip hop was a communal and informal activity. Crazy Legs describes early hip hop events in public parks as “a form of recreation” (Fernando Jr. 1999).

Nelson George (1999) elaborates about the nature of hip hop’s origins:

By naïve, I mean the spirit of openhearted innocence that created hip hop culture. The idea of parties in parks and community centers, which is celebrated nostalgically as the true essence of hip hop, means that money was not a goal. None of the three original DJ’s---(Kool) Herc, (Grandmaster) Flash, (Afrika) Bambaata---expected anything from the music but local fame, respect in the neighborhood, and the modest fees from the parties given at uptown clubs or the odd midtown ballroom. (p. 20)

Along with early deejays, George includes graffiti writers and breakdancers as early practitioners of hip hop who did it “because it felt good and because they could” (George 1999). The remaining element, rapping, is likely left out of George’s feel good story because it is the most capitalistic element of the four. Accordingly, after the subsequent appropriation of hip hop by corporations and the culture industry, rapping grew and expanded while deejaying took a back seat and graffiti art and breakdancing have all but vanished off of the popular culture landscape. Hip Hop culture is not the only folk culture to be latched onto by the culture industry. Other folk cultures, notably punk rock music were ultimately appropriated by mainstream culture (Blair 1993). Rap seems to be the element of hip hop culture that popular culture has latched onto because the characteristics of it so closely sync with similar characteristics found in capitalism and capitalistic enterprise. Rappers battle one another directly in tournaments, on record directly and indirectly and through promotional efforts on and off of recorded material. Additionally,

rap's competitive boasting spilled over into materialism and name brand mentions on records. Corporations are thrilled and have milked the free advertising and new customers driven to their products (Paoletta 2006). In capitalism, businesses relish being able to profit without spending anything. When they do decide to form partnerships with music artists, companies sign hip hop artists lead the way (Mitchell, Crosley, and Paoletta 2006). Though the whole of Hip Hop is rife with properties similar to those found in capitalism, some of its individual elements contain more of a concentration of these properties than others.

One of the two elements of hip hop that still possess significance in popular culture is deejaying. Hip Hop deejaying is a process of using musical equipment like turntables and mixers to play, mix and create music. Deejays are typically expected to spin records to entertain the audience at a party or gathering. In hip hop culture, the role of the deejay is expanded. Rap deejays "cut" or "scratch" records, a method of creating unique audio slices by allowing a record to spin partially, then manually dragging the record back to its starting point (Fernando Jr. 1999; George 1999). They may also be tasked with other activities like emceeing. In hip hop, deejays often compete against one another in contests set up to show who can demonstrate superior skill. Hip Hop deejays show their creativity and innovation by dancing along to the records they play, spinning in place, turning backwards while scratching or using the vocal samples on the records to create an audio sequence that shows originality or cleverness.

Another element of hip hop culture is Graffiti art. Graffiti artists use spray paint to adorn the walls of buildings, subway trains or other parts of the urban landscape with names, symbols or designs. Graffiti became popular amidst the gang culture of Philadelphia and New York (Jenkins 1999). When it first started getting popular, it offered kids an alternative to the gang lifestyle. Former Graffiti artist and author Sacha Jenkins (2002) describes the scene:

Since graffiti was an oddball outlet for independent thinkers, serious gangs like the Savage Skulls, Black Spades, and Savage Nomads weren't threatened by the writers' organizations; kids often roamed wild, neighborhood to neighborhood, free from harm, branding foreign terrain like a ranch hand does choice cattle. (p. 37)

For many members of the hip hop community, being in a gang and being a graffiti artist were mutually exclusive (Jenkins 2002). Highly scorned by New York City authorities when it emerged (Castleman 2004), graffiti is often competitive and territorial. Often called "tagging", Tricia Rose (1994) describes how graffiti art began to evolve:

By the mid-1970's, graffiti took on new focus and complexity. No longer a matter of simple tagging, graffiti began to develop elaborate individual styles, themes, formats, and techniques, most of which were designed to increase visibility, individual identity, and status. Themes in the larger works included hip hop slang, characterizations of b-boys, rap lyrics, and hip hop fashion. (p. 42)

Though graffiti began as a localized phenomenon, the practice spread. Flores (1987) and Rose (1994) document graffiti's use of colorful logos, and styles along with images borrowed from popular culture. Graffiti artists began stamping the environment with symbols of the culture industry. Aside from graffiti art supporter Mark Ecko, who is known more for his clothing line than as a graffiti artist, this element of hip hop culture is all but absent today.

A third part of hip hop culture, breakdancing, emerged much like graffiti did. The two forms both grew out of the presence of gang culture and evolved as alternatives to crew on crew violence (Shusterman 1991). Breakdancing is a form of dancing characterized by spinning, full body contact with the floor or sidewalk and typically the moves are very athletic. Like graffiti, breakdancing involves contests where dancers compete to see who can demonstrate the highest

skill level to the audience. When breakdancing began, it was a way for participants to battle one another directly, while avoiding actual fights or real physical violence (Banes 1981; Flores 1987). In the film “The Original Kings of Comedy”, Cedric the Entertainer re-enacts a scene not unfamiliar to people who witnessed these battles. Cedric plays breakdancers from opposing crews and mimics a disagreement. When a confrontation begins following their disagreement, the two imaginary participants try to outdo one another with the best break dance moves (Lee 2000) with the best dancer being considered the winner. Movies like 1984’s “Breakin’” and more recently 2004’s “You Got Served” illustrate scenes where dancers or groups of dancers are pitted against one another.

“Here it is – BAM!” Rap Takes Over

The most visible component of hip hop culture is emceeing. Commonly termed rapping, this part of the hip hop culture is credited to Grandmaster Flash (Fernando Jr. 1999):

Flash was at the center of another revolutionary change to the art form: the use of MC’s to fully augment the musical entertainment. He came with not one, not two, but five MC’s. What started out as simple catchphrases like “Say ‘Ho,’” “Say ‘Oh yeah,’” and “Clap ya hands to the beat, y’all” chanted over the groove was honed by Grandmaster Flash’s Furious Five MC’s. Through the efforts of the Furious Five, MC-ing progressed to a whole new level with such complicated routines as back-to-back rhyming, in tandem flows, and choreographed moves. (p. 19)

Rapping has since been cabbaged by the culture industry full force. I feel this is because of the four elements of hip hop, rapping contains the most characteristics that are found in capitalistic systems. These characteristics include the direct and indirect competition between rappers in a variety of forms, the direct and indirect promotional competition, the way rappers use neighborhood slang like capitalism uses capital and the way rap is structurally aligned with corporations and businesses by way of cultural trends within rap. Also, while other genres could be said to rely on innate or natural singing ability or a racial background that provides an area inaccessible to those other than the chosen ones, rap offers the same promise capitalism purports to offer. The idea is that if you get some support and a start that if you practice hard you can become successful and wealthy. Other genres are exclusionary based on being born with talent or a certain look or appeal. While rap artists are primarily Black, there have been numerous rappers of note who were not. Eminem, Jin, The Beastie Boys, Everlast, Marky Mark, Vanilla Ice, Paul Wall, Lady Sovereign and others. This characteristic of hip hop that suggests that anyone can make it in hip hop if they have a good idea and are willing to work is much like the oft-cited mantras in American capitalism that proclaim that anyone can achieve “The American Dream.”

Another capitalistic element is the manner in which rappers work together on record. In other genres collaborations between artists are typically sporadic. In rap, artists work together almost as a rule. Much like businesses co-operate with one another for mutual gain, they appear on and cross promote one another’s work. They form and break alliances, enter into group and independent ventures and even cross genres at times. Former Goodie M.O.B. member and rapper/singer Thomas “Cee-Lo Green” Callaway has released material as a member of the rap group Goodie M.O.B., as a solo artist, with producer DangerMouse under the name “Gnarls

Barkley” and he is working with producer Jazze Pha on material called “Happy Hour” as well as Plant Life’s Jack Splash and a project called “The Heart Attack”. Cee-Lo has collaborated with other hip hop artists on numerous other CD’S. In fall 2006, two rap albums were prime examples of this trend of extensive collaboration. Rapper Sean “Diddy” Combs released “Press Play” on October 17th. The CD featured collaborations with fellow hip hoppers The Neptunes, Nas, Timbaland, Will.I.am from The Black Eyed Peas, Pharoahe Monch, Havoc of Mobb Deep and the aforementioned Cee-Lo. Shawn “Jay-Z” Carter is set to release his return from retirement, “Kingdom Come”, on November 21st. Though no official tracklist has been released yet, the album is believed to have collaborations with Eminem, Timbaland, Pharrell, Just Blaze, Dr. Dre, T.I. and his R&B singing girlfriend Beyonce, among others. Much like large retailers partner with many other businesses or co-sponsor events, rappers are known to collaborate with one another.

Rappers perform lyrics, typically speaking in a rhythmic fashion over an accompanying instrumental track, though it is not uncommon for rappers to rap with no backing track. Like the other parts of hip hop culture, from its inception rapping was a competitive venture. However, the level of competition found in rapping via the structure and practices common in rapping make it the most capitalistic of all the elements.

Rappers battle one another in numerous ways. In freestyle battles, emcees will battle one another by spontaneously creating lyrics that criticize their opponent directly. A variant of this is to have two emcees in a freestyle battle where the most creative style is the criteria for victory, yet no direct criticism is made of an opponent. These battles are typically relatively informal but are sometimes incorporated into a tournament. Special events like Cincinnati’s Skribble Jam, MTV’s MC Battle and HBO’s Blaze Battle are examples of tournaments that have produced

freestyle champions like Wreckonize and Rhymesayers artist Eyedea. These tournaments were famously portrayed in Eminem's feature film "8 Mile". Regular radio shows like "The Wakeup Show" with Sway, Tech and DJ Revolution have provided a forum for emcee battles. Television shows like B.E.T.'s 106th & Park also host freestyle battles. Freestyle battle legend Jin became known for his successful appearances on their show segment "Freestyle Fridays." Rappers compete directly against one another at these events.

Another way rappers compete against one another is in the marketplace. They promote their CD's at every opportunity, put down competing products and artists, form alliances and partnerships and promote their labels. Rappers even promote the geographic location they are from while putting down rap product and culture associated with other regions.

Rappers also record these themes onto releases and promote their product over other artists' products while promoting themselves as superior artists in the process. Almost as a rule, rap seems to have marketing built into the structure of a typical rhyme or song. Neate (2004) describes it this way:

Think about the times you've caught a generic rock track by a generic rock band on generic rock radio. If you missed the DJ's announcement, you might never know the band's name. But a generic hip-hop track by a generic rapper on generic rap radio? Within eight bars, 'MC Lyrix' will have name-checked himself, his crew and probably the street where he grew up...Hip-hop – understands modern commercialism and it's little wonder that mainstream businesses have embraced hip-hop so wholeheartedly.
(p. 28)

Emceeing seems to be the most competitive element of hip hop. Shusterman (1991) theorizes that this is because of rap's "origins in neighborhood conflict and competition" (p. 619).

Rappers also use language very creatively. Using slang picked up from neighborhoods and the hip hop culture in general, they have popularized street terminology while allowing themselves to put out new, original material that capitalizes on it.

Rap has taken on many personalities. While it has split into various forms and versions, the main elements rappers use in their work remain in each form. When it began, rap was largely considered something used at parties and gatherings. The song “Rappers Delight” on the Sugar Hill label was a prominent example of this type of rap. This “party rap” still exists and the topics expressed in this type of rap are generally concerned with entertainment and keeping crowds moving, doing call and response or dancing. Missy Elliott is perhaps the most famous current practitioner of this style. While her party raps encourage people to dance and have fun, her lyrics are replete with the boasting, competition and promotion found in all forms of rap. In her virtual introduction to the national stage on MC Lyte’s song “Cold rock a party”, the previously unknown Elliott boasted about herself numerous times even though her single verse on the song lasted roughly 30 seconds. Rappers are marketers with a mic.

When rap began, it started in poor areas in New York. Conscious rap like “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash, pushed rap from its party origins into a form that was intent on discussing the often treacherous atmosphere that rappers and their fans existed in. Interestingly, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five were on the Sugar Hill label as well. Krs-1 and more recently rappers Common and Talib Kweli are artists that continue to practice conscious rap. Even though the music released by these artists typically focus on uplifting, political or educational topics, there is no shortage of self and group promotion, much like businesses whose brand superiority claims seem to be evident no matter what the topic of their presentation is.

Another form of rap that emerged is “gangsta rap”. This form depicts situations and struggles in rough neighborhoods and chronicles the happenings in impoverished areas. It relays the stories of the people and characters that form in response to the dangerous conditions that dominate these areas. Where conscious rap seemed concerned with describing these situations to alert and shame the general public, gangsta rap seemed to become content to live within and profit off of these depictions. 50 Cent and Mobb Deep are current artists considered practice gangsta rap. Though it contains specific themes and is distinct from many other forms of rap, again one finds the same boasting, methods of promotion and multiple forms of competition with other emcees.

Perhaps emerging from party rap, pop rap deals with whimsical, materialistic or suburban topics. The Fresh Prince, Skee-Lo and Young MC are best known for practicing this type of rap. Other categories include backpack or underground rap, southern rap, bling bling rap, and freestyles. In each form the main elements rappers practice are continuous throughout, in varying levels. In recent years new forms of rap have emerged and caught the public eye. Reggaeton is a Spanish-influenced hybrid of rap, perhaps popularized with Daddy Yankee’s hit “Gasolina”. Hyphy is a West coast style, brought to the forefront by Keak Da Sneak and E-40 that has been gaining popularity. Arguably the most successful new style of rap is what has been called Snap Music. Using a minimalist beat and finger snaps in recordings, artists from the South have pioneered this style, which first emerged on a national stage with the group D4L’s number one hit “Laffy Taffy”. All of these styles have the same recurring properties in them, rappers acting as marketers to promote their ventures over other artists’ properties.

But how did the elements of hip hop get infused with capitalistic, competitive structures? Rose (1994) surmises that it was likely the result of hip hop culture emerging out of the cultures

of people of color in the economic scarcity of 1970's post-industrial New York City: "Hip Hop is very competitive and confrontational; these traits are both resistance to and preparation for a hostile world that denies and denigrates young people of color" (1994:35-36)

Overall, while the hip hop culture attempts to position itself as an oppositional one (Hess 2005; Kopano 2002; Martinez 1997; Rose 1991), these four elements of culture are rife with capitalistic elements. Ultimately the characteristics of the hip hop subculture combined with its place in the culture industry reinforce the views and ideas of the dominant American culture.

In chapter four I use the theories and writings of the critical school to examine the Rap portion of hip hop culture. I write about the capitalistic elements of breakdancing, graffiti and deejaying but focus primarily on Rap music and an examination of critical theory as it relates to the numerous elements of capitalism embedded in the practices within it. I discuss contemporary literature on Rap music and offer insight on an unexplored topic, the capitalistic nature of Rap music and the resulting interaction between these characteristics and the commodification of Rap music. I also examine the capacity of Rap music to truly criticize or rebel against mainstream culture and society.

In chapter five I review the multiple parts of the hip hop culture. I examine how one part of the culture appears to have achieved the most success while the other parts either died out from obsolescence or moved from potential staples of pop culture to becoming high culture. I offer related conclusions and provide directions for future research and investigation based on the evidence provided by this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR: CAPITALISM

Here I argue that Rap and Capitalism have many points of intersect and overlap. I will first provide a description of capitalism and then show corresponding points in Rap.

Capitalism is an economic system that is characterized primarily by free market competition between persons and businesses and the creation of capital or excess profit. Marx looked at the capitalist system and viewed it as the source of class struggles. He analyzed the capitalist system and argued that business owners reaped the profits created by the working class (Marx 1998). In Marx's estimation business owners make money in excess of the production costs for the goods and services they produce and profit from the labor of the working class members of society. Marx theorized that the operative qualities of capitalism would ultimately be its downfall. He argued that as capitalism advances, the business class profits in an increasingly efficient manner, laying off many employees and exploiting the remaining workers. The capitalists are the property owners and controllers of society. Marx argued that as capitalism matured, it would become evident that the upper class capitalists were not fit to run society because of the extreme disparity that would exist between the upper and working classes. Subsequently a revolution would take place that would be the end of capitalism.

Marcuse (1964) examined the culture industry within capitalism and wrote about the false needs that were created, the way products were swallowed up by the machine and the preconditioning of society by capitalist systems. He also noted the influence of the culture industry in capitalism in creating false needs and aiding in the regression of art forms along with lose the loss of their potential to challenge society. Habermas examined oppositional characteristics of systems in capitalism (Seidman 1989) to determine what systems if any are

truly oppositional within it. Benjamin (1968) wrote about the loss of originality in art in advanced capitalistic society, theorizing that mechanical reproduction and technological advancements made authenticity lose meaning. Marketing is also an important element in capitalism. Businesses use numerous marketing strategies to compete with one another in capitalism. Another trend in capitalistic economies is the use of youth as an ideal.

In capitalism, persons compete directly against one another for jobs, money and wealth. People form businesses that compete with other enterprises for market share and to create capital or excess money that is then reinvested into the business to spur growth. Companies form partnerships, collaborate on joint ventures and work with one another to compete effectively in the marketplace.

In capitalist societies, companies create marketing plans to sell their goods and services for profit. The American Marketing Association defines marketing as “an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders” (American Marketing Association Board of Directors 2004). Marketing includes advertising, pricing, distribution and other strategies aimed at promoting and ultimately selling a product or service. Companies create commercials and advertisements that appear on radio, television, in magazines and films, on the side of the road and inside stores.

Another trait that emerges in capitalism as it becomes more advanced is the almost idolization of youth by corporate entities. Ewen (1976) identified the 1920’s as the beginning of American corporations treating youth as a corporate ideal. Capitalist American society had been focused on the skill of the experienced elder and then corporations transformed their target audience from adults to children. Ewen tracks how corporations shifted the focus of when

materialistic consumption was to be expected to the childhood years. Ewen goes on to examine how corporations not only set these ideals on youth, they went further and actually encapsulated youth and sold youth itself in advertising. Youth was positioned as something that could be obtained or pursued if you used a businesses' product. Ewen speaks of Max Horkheimer's prior analysis of this phenomenon in Horkheimer's essay "The End of Reason", writing that "Max Horkheimer spoke of the way in which the development of a centralized, corporate authority made use of the concept of youth" (1976 p. 143).

Rap: Biting Capitalism's Rhyme

The way rap culture is organized and practiced, it is structurally similar to capitalism. In a late capitalistic society like America, this synchronicity allowed hip hop to go from a localized practice to a central element of American culture. The adaptation of hip hop into the mainstream was facilitated by its capitalistic characteristics. While the hip hop culture arguably envisions itself as opposed to and outside of the ideals and views of dominant culture and society, because of its structure it is actually an integral part of the culture industry and thus enhances dominant culture.

The element of rap that best exhibits hip hop's capitalistic characteristics is also what it is primarily known for: Emceeing. In capitalism, individuals or collectives start up businesses and compete directly against other businesses. Rap artists closely match capitalistic trends because they directly challenge and compete against one another. Businesses market their products by

promoting them whenever an appropriate opportunity emerges, and sometimes even when it seems inappropriate. While the image of early hip hop is painted as that of a localized phenomenon whose practitioners sought artistic pleasure while eschewing material gain, Rose (1994) writes that hip hop artists were simply unaware that they could get paid for their activities:

The problem was not that they were uniformly uninterested in profit; rather many of the earliest practitioners were unaware that they could profit from their pleasure. Once this link was made, hip hop artists began marketing themselves wholeheartedly. (p. 40)

Rappers have been battling one another since hip hop began. In hip hop rappers directly battle other rappers. In capitalism, businesses and corporations are known to promote their product as being better than the leading competitor. Similarly, it is embedded in the standard rhetoric of a rapper to deem themselves and their work better than other rappers, whether on record or off. Even during a collaborative recording effort with other rappers they are affiliated with or friends with, they still proclaim their superiority over all other rappers. On the 2006 song “Speed Racin” rapper Chaundon appears, proudly exclaiming how he is better than all other rappers. This includes the three other emcees who recorded it with him. This is standard practice in rap. Rappers spare no expense to promote their emceeing brand furtively much like businesses relentlessly advertise their products and services.

The Money is where their Mouths are

Another prominent trait associated with capitalism is a growth element. In capitalism, excess profit or capital itself is the vital characteristic. Businesses capitalize from the labor of the working class members of society, skimming the extra value from it, reinvesting that into the business so that it survives and grows, and repeating this process. This process is mirrored in rap. In their songs hip hop artists use terminology and slang that emerges from neighborhoods, popular culture or from hip hop culture. Rap artists turn neighborhood slang terms and phrases like “The Vapors”, “Grills”, “Hyphy” or “Peel Their Caps Back” into songs. Drawing from this plentiful source, rap is the genre that features a growth element similar to the mechanism that operates in capitalism. Alim (2002) analyzed Rap lyrics and concluded that Rap artists consciously monitor their speech patterns to more closely align themselves with neighborhood culture:

Hip Hop artists, by the very nature of their circumstances, are ultraconscious of their speech. As members of the (Hip Hop Nation), they exist in a cultural space where extraordinary attention is paid to speech. Hip Hop artists consciously vary their speech to “represent” the streets. (p. 300)

Similarly, Keyes (1996) also locates the language of neighborhood streets as a source for Rap music production: “Rap music is undoubtedly an amalgam of street language coding, style, and musical sounds” (p. 241). Rappers can create slang terms that they use in their music. An example of this is rapper 50 Cent’s first major hit “Wanksta.” A hybrid of the hip hop terms “wack” and “gangsta” this is a term he created that refers to people who falsely inflate their

social status. This creation was precisely what rap legend Rakim referred to when he said “take a phrase that’s rarely heard – flip it, now it’s a daily word” in his famous 1988 song “Follow the Leader”. Rapper Sir Mix-A-Lot popularized the term “Hooptie”, slang for an extremely cheap car, with his 1990 song of the same name. Though they sometimes originate their own unique slang variations, rappers typically adopt slang that is created by people on the streets and in neighborhoods to create new music. The Hyphy movement in California is a contemporary example of slang use in hip hop. The term only recently became popular and debate is ongoing about the origins of the terminology used within it. Rapper Keak Da Sneak was the first rapper with a song titled “Hyphy” in 2005, though he reveals the origin of the term on MTV’s documentary program “My Block: The Bay” (Reid, Calloway, and Patel 2006). He described its origin and evolution saying it came about when he was a child and adults would say “Don’t give him that much candy, he’ll get hyper. Then it was highly reactionary, then it was highly reactional, then it was hyphy.” The Other terms associated with the Hyphy movement are “go dumb”, which is to let yourself lose control while dancing or partying, and “ghostriding the whip”, which is driving a car at a slow speed and dancing on top or around it as it coasts. Another well known rap slang term is “crunk”, a combination of the words crazy and drunk, popularized by Atlanta’s Lil Jon. Rapper Ice-T’s song “O.G.: Original Gangsta” used slang that had previously been circulating neighborhoods. Similarly, Dr Dre’s classic CD “The Chronic” took its name from slang terminology appropriated from the neighborhood. “Chronic” is a term that refers to marijuana. By using this term, Dr. Dre implied that his music was cool and addictive. Slang is the currency rap uses to operate.

Much like businesses create a surplus with their business models, rappers are known to use slang in the same manner. The streets are full of standard slang terminology that rappers

must be familiar with to come off as credible performers. Even if they don't use the common terminology from the streets and in neighborhood areas in their raps or performances, a knowledge and understanding of it is paramount. This common slang language use constitutes the production costs for an artist, much like a business must pay some amount to suppliers of the material they use to create the product or service they are selling. Beyond this standard slang usage, rappers frequently acquire or create slang that they then use in their raps and recorded work. This use of slang functions as rap's growth element, allowing each rapper's enterprise of sorts, to expand. The unique terms that a rapper comes to be known for can then be reinvested into their raps much like a business reinvests surplus back into their business.

Snoop Doggy Dogg's popularization of "izzle" slang, where a word is transformed by substituting "izzle" after the initial sound of a word, became his hallmark. Since using this slang on his first album, he's used it in numerous raps in his own catalogue of material as well as collaborations with other artists. Wu-Tang clan members took samples from Kung-Fu films and have used them over and over in the group's releases as well as their solo ventures. The founder of the group, RZA, spoke about Wu-Tang's use of these samples. On Vh-1's Hip Hop Honors 2006 program, he explained "When Wu-Tang first was known on Staten Island, it was a slang word, because a lot of guys had seen the Kung-Fu flick and it was so fly they was like '*yo, that's Wu-Tang, yo*' – anything that was fly was called Wu-Tang." The use of slang allows rappers to continually create new music, whether they reinvest it into their future rhymes or repeatedly release songs informed by new slang terminology. Songs that take advantage of this from the past decade include "Sippin' on Some Syrup" by Three Six Mafia featuring Project Pat and UGK, "Kryptonite" by a group headed up by Outkast's 'Big Boi, and "Wamp Wamp (what it do)" by The Clipse. All three song titles are from street slang references to drugs.

Rappers also share similarities with capitalist enterprises because they frequently form musical partnerships with other rap artists. Much like businesses work with one another, bundle complimentary items or software from other companies with their product releases and suggest other companies' products in concert with theirs, rap artists frequently appear on one another's musical projects. One example of this phenomenon is Redman, who has five commercial CD's during his 14 year career but has appeared on at least 41 releases by other Rap artists. Redman also released a CD length collaboration titled "Blackout!" with fellow rapper Method Man. The two have appeared in commercials and films together as well. Six years into his career, rapper Ludacris has four CD releases but has appeared on at least 32 CD's by other Rap artists. As a collective, the 9 members of the Wu-Tang Clan have released numerous CDs as a group and as individuals since 1993 when the group released the classic CD "Enter the 36 Chambers". In addition to this each member has appeared on many other rap artists releases. Frequent collaboration is a staple in Rap music. Busta Rhymes' appearance at the 2006 B.E.T. awards was reminiscent of a charity or tribute performance because of the number of artists that performed on a single song. His performance of "Touch It" featured verses from fellow rappers Missy Elliott, DMX, Papoose, Lloyd Banks, Rah Digga, Eminem and even R&B songstress Mary J Blige. A song where numerous emcees appear is sometimes termed a "posse cut", if the performers are all from the same crew. Classic Rap tracks like "The Anthem" which featured eight rappers and "Scenario", which featured five, are more examples of rappers' joint ventures.

Less Capitalistic Tracks

The other elements of hip hop also contain capitalistic properties, but less than rapping does. In breakdancing, deejaying and graffiti the focus is typically competition and advertising. Breakdancers compete directly against one other individually or group against group. Hip Hop dancing is different than breakdancing. The main identifying characteristic of breakdancing is that the dances performed typically require the dancer to be on the floor intermittently. Hip Hop dancing often involves synchronized choreography while breakdancing is typified by extended periods of individual dance and freestyles. Breakdancers would challenge one another to dance-offs and let the audience be the judge of who was the superior performer. In its heyday, breakdancing crews had a group name and matching jackets or other distinguishing brands that identified them and set them apart from other crews.

Graffiti art also involved competition and advertising. Graffiti artists were known to spread their tags far and wide, essentially trying to gain brand recognition (Jenkins 1999). Deejays talk over music and advertise themselves. DJ Whoo Kid shouts his name over the tracks he creates. DJ Clue's beats have "Clue!" shouted over them. Deejays and Producers like Jazze Pha and Clinton Sparks have their stamps "Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a Jazze Phizzle production" and "Get Familiar", respectively. DJ's Timbaland, Kay Slay and Green Lantern all speak their names over their music as a marketing tool. It also serves another business-competitive function: to prevent other deejays from profiting by claiming they produced the music. This practice is essentially the creation of an aural brand. Products like shirts, cars,

grocery products, and appliances – these items have the manufacturers brand stamped on them. Deejays sonically replicate this in rap music.

In the music industry a DJ or producer is typically unknown and anonymous to the listening audience. These characteristics of the rap music industry make it easy for the culture industry to commodify it and adapt it for use. The operation of these characteristics of rap culture in the context of the culture industry also calls into question any classification of the hip hop subculture as a truly oppositional one.

Critical School Flows: A Model for Rap

The critical school's writing about advanced capitalism and the domination of the culture industries provide the theoretical base that explains hip hop's operation within the culture industry.

Marcuse (1964) presents the culture industry, as termed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), as an oppressive and entrenched societal machine. Marcuse (1964) views popular culture entities as creating false needs such as the need to “relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements” (p. 5). He also suggests these needs or values become internalized but ultimately are still the product of the dominant society and its views. For rappers that view themselves as raging against the system, Marcuse would feel they have internalized capitalistic views and the structure of their industry is such that it is a willing arm, a popular culture clone of capitalism.

Marcuse theorizes that dominant society and culture accomplishes its goal by preconditioning members of all classes of society to have essentially similar needs, wants and purchasing goals. He supposes that this system is so effective that dissent is reduced to proposing oppositional ideas within the existing system, as opposed to truly challenging the system itself. This is what is occurring with rap music. Even artists attempting to propose somewhat oppositional ideas within the popular culture are functioning in a subsystem whose framework is deeply capitalistic, augmenting and even propelling the larger system of capitalism many of the artists decry. A great many rappers have accepted the values handed down by the elite and espouse fervent consumerism, cutthroat business savvy and traditional patriarchy, but the other rappers are still essentially helping to perpetuate those beliefs.

Marcuse's evaluation of society characterizes the typical citizen as one inundated with the ideals created and perpetuated by society, so that even a person's impulses are an attempt to seek the path that the culture industry has set out for the person long in advance. Marcuse (1964) quotes fellow critical school theorist Theodor Adorno in providing the observation that "advanced industrial culture is more ideological than its predecessor, inasmuch as today the ideology is in the process of production itself" (p. 11). Marcuse says that "the productive apparatus and the goods and services which it produces "sell" or impose the social system as a whole" (1964:11).

The framework of each element of the hip hop subculture, most notably the rap element, is distinctly capitalistic structurally. Marcuse's argument suggests that rappers operating within the structure of the hip hop subculture function as salespersons for dominant society and the mainstream social system, whether they attempt to present themselves as oppositional to mainstream culture and values or not. Further, Marcuse describes how the relationship between

art and society was previously one of “negation”. This means art served to offer up a view of life separate from societal reality. It was a platform to criticize and analyze reality by its very presentation, a “refusal” of sorts, of society. Art was to offer up distinctively different visions and ideas. In advanced capitalistic society, Marcuse (1964) imagines an ever narrowing gap between “the arts and the order of the day” (p. 64). He writes:

The works of alienation are themselves incorporated into this society and circulate as part and parcel of the equipment which adorns and psychoanalyzes the prevailing state of affairs. Thus they become commercials – they sell, comfort, or excite. (p. 64)

Rap artists such as Paris, MC Ren, Dead Prez and the Coup create works that are considered by many as works of alienation and truth. These artists put out music while signed to labels financially backed by major corporations. The hip hop subculture and its practitioners are examples of the merger of art and dominant societal ideals. Marcuse (1964) theorizes that after the gap between art and societal reality is closed, society continually coordinates more and more effectively so that artistic products are woven into the fabric of society in any space.

It is also more “integrated” – the cultural center is becoming a fitting part of the shopping center, or municipal center, or government center. ... It is good that almost everyone can now have the fine arts at his fingertips, by just turning a knob on his set, or by just stepping into his drugstore. In this diffusion, however, they become cogs in a culture-machine which remakes their content. Artistic alienation succumbs, together with other modes of negation, to the process of technological rationality. (p. 65)

Marcuse’s technological rationality refers to ideas about how false needs are created within capitalism that control and drive societal wants and needs. Instead of technology freeing society, automating processes that free man from labor while providing food for him to survive, the false

needs created by technological rationality rule it instead. Hip Hop artists aren't just succumbing to this; they're actively pushing false needs and enhancing capitalistic enterprise. Rap artists are taking Marcuse's ideas one step further. These artists are not merely acquiescing and giving up a push for artistic alienation to the pressures of industry years after "the great refusal" of the art they produced, they are actively involved in capitalistic ventures that often go directly against the principles they espoused in their recent material, as a result of the characteristics of hip hop itself. Ewen (1976) describes how trying to bring about social change within the capitalism controlled culture industries is ineffective:

As we are confronted by the mass culture, we are offered the idiom of our own criticism as well as its negation—corporate solutions to corporate problems. Until we confront the infiltration of the commodity system into the interstices of our lives, social change itself will be but a product of corporate propaganda. (p. 219)

Regardless of the message, hip hop culture is essentially contained within capitalism and the culture industries. Lyrically, rappers have embraced capitalism, the culture industry and its products.

This Song for Rent: Self and Product Advertising in Rap

A February, 2006 Billboard article discussed corporate brand references in the lyrics of 2005's top songs (Paoletta 2006). Predictably the vast majority of top brand referencing artists were hip hop artists. Hip Hop culture appears to embrace capitalism and mainstream values. Hip Hop group The Black Eyed peas positioned themselves in so many commercials,

advertisements and product promotions that NBC's television show "Saturday Night Live" parodied them on November 8th, 2005 with a sketch that implied they would appear for virtually any kind of ad or service. At the 2001 MTV Awards, R&B/hip hop artist Macy Gray wore a dress to an awards show emblazoned with an L.E.D. display with the release date for her latest CD on the front and "Buy it" on the back. During the show, rapper DMX promoted his latest CD instead of reading scripted lines for the program. The trend has continued and was evident at the 2006 B.E.T. awards. The most flagrant example of the night was the rap duo Outkast, who were set to announce the final award of the night, yet plugged their movie "Idlewild" first. Hip Hop is so capitalistic that these actions are accepted and become more commonplace each year. The characteristics it possesses makes it an ideal vehicle for businesses to partner with members of the hip hop community.

Rage Within the Machine: The Rhythmic Beat of Rapitalism

Even those in the hip hop culture delivering the most extreme messages have chosen to embrace capitalism. While some rap artists rap messages that convey an extreme dislike of capitalism, the practices and structure in rap seem to prevent escape from an ultimate endorsement of and containment inside it. Oscar Jackson, who raps under the name Paris, is known for writing radical lyrics about revolution, Black Nationalism, the brutality of the state, and for featuring controversial political imagery on his album packaging. The covers of his CD's have featured a Black Panther (an ode to the revolutionary civil rights group), weapons, the prelude to a presidential assassination attempt and a plane flying into the white house post 9-11.

For all his vivid imagery and seemingly dangerous ideologies, in an online interview (Byrne 2003) he sounded pedestrian as he talked about trying to effect social change within capitalism and the culture industries:

“A lot of people decry the unfairness of the capitalist system,” he says. “But we all participate. You can piss and moan and say you do not want to participate and let someone else steer it for you, or you can take up the tools and bring about change on an individual level.”

Here the culture industries and capitalism have enveloped one of the most radical hip hop artists to date. The music Paris makes attempting to be oppositional, instead is swallowed by capitalism and the culture industry.

Another outspoken rapper who is considered revolutionary or conscious is KRS-One. Beside his many songs criticizing everything from corrupt governments and officials to the IRS, KRS also specifically pointed out capitalism and declared in a 1992 interview (Lipscomb 1992): “I’m saying they (early Americans) wanted to enslave the world. The birth of capitalism is the birth of wage slavery” (p. 177). A few years later, KRS did a voiceover in a basketball shoe commercial for Nike, one of the top capitalistic enterprises in the history of the world. KRS’s voiceover was derived from Gil Scott-Heron’s subversive spoken word poem “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”. Instead of the poem’s message of Black people going into the street seeking to overthrow the social order, the Nike commercial ends with KRS voicing the altered lines “The revolution is basketball and basketball is the truth”. Critical theory foresaw this process, and it occurred in the products of someone who was considered a voice from the margins, a Black male outsider, someone intent on defying the system.

Mos Def is another rapper who attempts to use his music as a critique of dominant culture and industry. On his 1999 CD “Black on Both Sides”, his song “New World Water” criticizes large corporations that pollute or dominate water sources, often causing harm to the indigenous people of the land. A few years later in 2005 he did a commercial for corporate giant General Motors, advertising a large sports utility vehicle. At the same time the commercial was released, General Motors was being characterized as a company that was purported to have a substandard environmental record (Rockhold 2005). The company was cited as being “on a reverse course-- becoming the worst major automaker in terms of pollution and fuel economy” (p. 21). Beyond just confusing the nature of these artists’ attempted oppositional stance, these actions serve to directly help the causes they were apparently opposing.

The structure of hip hop informs these actions because two of the dominant ideologies in rap and hip hop culture are to get money and secondly to not “knock the hustle” (Neate 2004). So that embedded in the structure the message to rappers is “cash rules everything around me” (a lyric from a song on Wu Tang Clan’s 1999 debut CD “Enter the 36 Chambers”), but also to not question someone who has “hustled” their way to some kind of monetary payoff. Marcuse goes on to suggest that truly oppositional works, such as those produced as Dadaism or surrealism, actually resist the very meanings people would normally glean from them, communicating “the break with communication” (1964:68). He explains how Dadaist work “rejects the very structure of discourse” (1964:68). He points out how in surrealist paintings “the traditional stuff of art (images, harmonies, colors) re-appears only as ‘quotes,’ residues of past meaning in a context of refusal” (1964:68). This process goes on in the hip hop subculture but is stripped of any true oppositional qualities.

Marcuse Goes Solo: Stripped of the Great Refusal and Headed for Desublimation

Almost as a rule, producers of hip hop music use samples from earlier work, but while the purpose in surrealist art is to get at the association or meaning of the “residue” in its previous context of refusal, the hip hop producer removes the refusal and plants it into a song that will transform it into an impotent element of a song that ultimately promotes the values and structure of the culture industry and the dominant society. Pop/hip hop artist Gwen Stefani used an interpolation of the song “Rich Girl” by Reggae artist Lady Saw in an updated version that stripped the song of any form of refusal, transposing it into a reflection of the false desires Marcuse refers to in *One Dimensional Man*.

In February 2006, a promotional commercial for the PGA’s Chrysler Classic of Tucson used the song “By the time I get to Arizona” by revolutionary themed rap group Public Enemy. At the time of its release the song and the video were controversial, with its portrayal of Chuck D setting off explosives that destroyed a government building in protest of the state of Arizona not adopting the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. When used in a commercial advertising a sport symbolic of the bourgeoisie and property owners control over society, it clearly had lost any true power of opposition.

Revolutionary themed hip hop artist M.I.A.’s song “Galang” was used in a Honda Civic commercial. Her album is replete with Marxist themes about the working class raising up and fighting back, the scandal of oppressive and murderous governmental powers and the lure of the culture industry. “Galang”, the song she personally licensed for the ad, contains lyrics that discuss topics like the previously referenced message from the dominant society that hard work will save you, criticism of the U.S. president and the idea of inner city youth becoming paranoid

after being followed by the police. This song is followed by an untitled track where M.I.A. sings “Don’t sell out to be product pushers.” These themes might be considered oppositional but ultimately the product being sold in the marketplace enhances the culture industries so any effect is neutralized overall. The structure of the hip hop industry and the norm within it to compete is what drove her decision. The Sri Lankan born artist explained it in this manner:

On the one hand, every Sri Lankan drives a Honda. It’s almost like a joke that Tamils and Sri Lankans drive Hondas. I thought it might be funny to go there. They paid me loads of money, and I’m a first-generation refugee who used to have nothing. I just don’t have the privilege to turn these things down. I had these Hip-Hop guys in LA trying to give me shit about it too, but I wasn’t hearing it. These guys are all about hustling and making something out of nothing. I grew up in a mud hut and now Honda’s giving me all this cash? That’s what I call a real hustle. (Urb Magazine, December 2005)

Any oppositional stance disappears and M.I.A. is appropriated into the culture industry, selling a slickly packaged automobile. As their material is packaged, integrated into the system of mainstream society and technology, and sold to consumers right along with chewing gum and People magazine, the final effect is anything but what Marcuse terms “the Great Refusal – the protest against that which is” (1964:63).

In *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse (1969) talks about how “Black music” has fallen prey to what he terms “desublimation”:

Black music is originally music of the oppressed, illuminating the extent to which the higher culture and its sublime sublimations, its beauty, have been class-based. The affinity between black music (and its avant-gardistic white development) and the political rebellion against the “affluent society” bears witness to the increasing desublimation of

culture. This desublimation leaves the traditional culture, the illusionist art behind unmastered: their truth and their claims remain valid – next to and together with the rebellion, within the same given society. The rebellious music, literature, art are thus easily absorbed and shaped by the market – rendered harmless. In order to come into their own, they would have to abandon the direct appeal, the raw immediacy of their presentation, which invokes, in the protest, the familiar universe of politics and business, and with it the helpless familiarity of frustration and temporary release from frustration.

(p. 47)

This critique of capitalism and the culture industry seems to match with the current rise of a sub-genre of rap music termed “Snap Music”. While rap lyrics and production had gotten increasingly complex, snap music falls right into the desublimation that Marcuse describes. Snap music is replete with simple sounds and even simpler lyrics. The simplicity of the music is pushed as its main selling point. The organization of the hip hop subculture not only falls within the framework, influence and control of the culture industry, in many ways it is structurally a microcosm of American capitalism.

Marcuse’s ideas were illustrated in 2006, shortly after the hip hop group “Little Brother” released a CD called “The Minstrel Show”. The album was an attack leveled at the rap music industry and its love of rap and rappers who espouse materialism, gangsterism and hustling to profit off of their predominantly white consumer base. On one of their official websites the lead rapper of Little Brother, Phonte, discussed how he encountered the type of rappers he’d railed against, and how they wanted to work with his group (Coleman 2006). He called himself a hypocrite in saying that he in fact wanted to work with them and felt the CD made some assumptions. The message of “The Minstrel Show” was thus completely neutralized and the

group was just another way to sell music, a commodity on the shelf to be purchased right alongside the type of music they were criticizing.

Is the encasing of hip hop within the culture industries an effective neutering of any oppositional properties, or are these efforts properly viewed in another light? Though there are muted attempts to oppose dominant culture, hip hop does not seem to have resulted in the creation of any organized opposition. Nelson George (1999) described how hip hop has not led to the emergence of any discernable resistance: “It has spawned no grassroots activist organization on the order of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Black Panther Party, NAACP, or even the Country Music Association” (p. 154). Potter (1995) suggests that while these efforts by hip hop to be a resistive force might appear fragmented, futile or non-existent, hip hop’s efforts should be viewed as a guerilla strategy of resistance:

It is not a monolithic battering ram (and indeed, where would one batter?), but a guerilla incursion; it steals language, steals sounds, steals the media spotlight, then slips away, regrouping at another unpredictable cultural site. (p. 76)

Potter identifies the dilemma with this idea. Since many oppositional ideas in hip hop are aimed at white listeners, are these listeners doing anything more than listening passively? Despite the formation of groups like rapper Yo-Yo’s Intelligent Black Women’s Coalition (which has long since disappeared after barely making a mark at all) the seeming lack of any significant amount of identifiable guerilla moments seem to point to the fleeting nature of such tactics in hip hop. Some oppositional messages may be there, but they are effectively contained and neutralized within the capitalist system and domination of the culture industries.

Potter quotes a statement from hip hop duo Outkast’s 1994 album where the group talks about how their music is not about “pimping hoes”, it’s about being looked out as outcasts and

ultimately reveling in the position. Potter (1995) exclaims “As this credo clearly embodies, hip-hop is about a fundamental oppositional stance” (p. 153). Less than 10 years later, Outkast released a double CD with two lead singles. The first was “Hey Ya”, which featured rapper Andre 3000 with straightened hair in an American Bandstand-like motif wearing a horse riding outfit and appearing to do his best to fit not only into mainstream American culture, but idealized, nostalgic American culture. The second single featured the other member of the group, Big Boi, surrounded by bikini-clad women in various settings.

Rappers’ existence within the culture industries and capitalism appears to continually steer them towards commercialized outputs with themes palatable to the dominant culture. Even if themes of opposition or alienation remain, they are, as Marcuse reveals, neutralized within the paradigms of the capitalist system. Neate (2004) describes this process of neutralization:

If you accept that hip-hop and by extension issues of social exclusion (poverty, race and so on) have been appropriated as brands, then their discussion has been reduced to no more than sound bites and slogans that work a treat in media whose wages are paid by said brands. (p. 41)

Marcuse’s work also applies to the idea of hip hop being considered resistance of the dominant culture. The progressive rap group “The Coup” released the CD “Party Music” in November 2001. The original CD cover featured lead rapper Boots and the group’s deejay using wands to conduct music as parts of the world trade center exploded behind them. The cover was considered controversial after the events of September 2001, and so it was replaced. Boots described the cover in an online interview in March 2006: “On the album I have a bass tuner and Pam [the Funktress] has conductor’s wands. It’s supposed to make the statement that our music is destroying capitalism” (Maharaj 2006) Marcuse would argue that their music is actually

augmenting capitalism because it is available for sale for the benefit of the culture industry. Though the group released a CD titled “Steal This Album” and another called “Genocide and Juice”, no notable political action has come from their presence and Neate’s evaluation of hip hop’s place within Marcuse’s paradigm remains poignant.

Habermas: “You Down With Opp.?”

Critical school theorist Jurgen Habermas characterizes the attempted social opposition in another way (Seidman 1989). He separates collective attempts to combat the ideas of the dominant society into two groups – those that have revolutionary potential and those that are merely resisting or withdrawing. He feels that feminism is the only opposition left with revolutionary potential. At best then, Rap has the potential to be a resistive force, but with its numerous ties to capitalistic enterprise, any attempt at resistance is ultimately too intertwined with the goals and structure of capitalist society and mass culture that has latched onto it.

Hip Hop Art and Mechanical Reproduction: Walter Benjamin’s Ideas

The critical school also looks at other downsides of the culture industry. Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (Benjamin 1968) is an examination of the loss of originality in art due to advanced methods of copying that emerge in advanced capitalism. Benjamin argues that the authenticity of a work of art lies in its aura,

which rests in the tradition and ritual it was created in. Once technology reaches a stage where many copies can be easily made of a work of art and the copies are identical to the original, authenticity loses meaning (Benjamin 1968).

The music industry in general has been susceptible to these ideas with the emergence of mp3s but one of the embedded practices in hip hop is also subject to the idea of easy reproduction leading to a loss of authenticity. Hip Hop music is well known for its use of music samples. Potter (1995) invokes Benjamin in theorizing that mechanical reproduction via sampling in hip hop leads to loss of authenticity. While sampling does offer rappers the ability to take popular culture and recontextualize or reinterpret it as hip hop artists sometimes do (McRobbie 1994), sound samples are typically used without any specific purpose or deliberate intention to reference or call attention to the original work it came from. In rap, many sound samples and beats have been used in so many songs that the sound of the sample is well known by hip hop fans yet they are completely ignorant about the sample's origin. In other genres bands typically play and record instruments but in rap, samples are used extensively to create more music.

The song "It's A New Day" by the group Skull Snaps was sampled at least forty-eight times by rap artists in songs fans would recognize, but the average hip hop fan is likely unaware of the origins of these sounds. Similarly, legendary artist James Brown's song "Funky Drummer" has been sampled by rap artists at least 155 times. Potter (1995) labeled it "the single most-sampled beat in hip-hop" (p. 40-41). While Skull Snaps and their music are largely unknown to rap fans, Brown's song has been sampled many times. Yet even though he is a well known artist and music legend, "Funky Drummer" has been reproduced so many times that the samples serve as just copies of sound bites. The sounds would likely not conjure up memories

of the *original* song to music fans. Another song, Hank Crawford's "Wildflower" was used in different songs by well known rappers Tupac Shakur (Shorty Wanna Be a Thug), Eminem (No One's Iller) and Kanye West (Drive Slow), but the sounds that are sampled are now simply sounds. The songs do not recontextualize Crawford's song or make reference to it. The effect is the loss of authenticity after the sounds are reproduced again and again. This process Benjamin described as occurring in advanced capitalism is evident in music in hip hop, where samples are used frequently and repeatedly.

Rap: Selling the Anti-Capitalist Cake and Nibbling on it too

In the same way that rap artists use samples from music, capitalism essentially samples rappers – using them to make money. Frankfurt School critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote a critique of the machinery of mainstream that explores this idea. Their book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* looks at the way the dominant society controls culture and warps everything it controls. They theorize that in advanced capitalistic societies, a single dominant culture emerges thanks to factors like mass production, concentration of power and technological tools. The result is that this form of industry not only controls culture but actually creates it, and what it creates and influences is a culture that is primarily concerned with domination, predictability and reproduction of itself.

While hip hop culture is a major money maker for the culture industry, its representatives and core constituency are fully controlled and have minimal power (Neate 2004). Rap artists are

viewed as anti-establishment figures yet most fully function entirely within it. Negus (1999) documented how figures in rap were accepted into the corporate world of the music industry on a substandard level, or not at all. So not only are rap artists and the hip hop subculture used by the culture industry, this use is aiming at maximizing their exploitation. Personnel in the hip hop subculture are milked for marketable goods and simultaneously they are systematically denied access to the capital that is created. Negus (1999) reveals that rap representatives have often been denied “direct access”, given lower budgets, poorer contracts or have simply been “cut from the roster when there is a financial crisis” (p.504):

The physical and discursive borders erected through the organizational arrangements and knowledge practices of the contemporary music industry have not resulted in rap producers and musicians being ‘co-opted’ or invited into the boardroom in ways comparable to the type of osmosis that has occurred with respect to other genres, most notably the way in which rock moved from the street to the executive suite. (p. 504)

Neal (1999) also documents this treatment of raps principals:

Many of these artist/producers remain distanced from the real seats of power within their respective corporate homes—power that could be defined along the lines of joint or sole ownership of recording masters, control over production and promotional costs, and the authority to hire and replace internal staff members. In many regards, many of these ghetto merchants are little more than glorified managers or overseers, involved in what was little more than a twenty-first century plantation operation. (p. 149)

Though many hip hop representatives are being dominated by this system, the situation is not one where hip hop culture was without capitalistic inclination and the unaware practitioners were

swallowed up in the tidal wave of capitalism. Rose (1994) seeks to properly characterize the nature of early rap culture:

“The contexts for creation in hip hop were never fully outside or in opposition to commodities,” Rose writes. What is more important about the shift in hip hop’s orientation is not its movement from precommodity to commodity but the shift in control over the scope and direction of the profit-making process, out of the hands of local black and Hispanic entrepreneurs and into the hands of larger, white-owned, multinational businesses. (p. 40)

Hip Hop seems to have been well suited for the transition into being a major force in the culture industry.

Ultimately, because of the processes in rap that make it easily adopted into capitalism, rap artists are controlled by it, though some research sees the use of language in hip hop as resistance. Kopano (2002) stresses that rap music has roots in the tradition of African reverence for the spoken and written word. In America, Kopano theorizes that rappers are continuing this tradition of cultural resistance through words spoken and written in rap music. Kopano asserts that new language is created and used by a protesting force in opposition to the established culture. While Kopano uses bebop to argue that artists in that music genre had essentially rejected Western cultural ideals, when he extends that idea to rap it does not work as well. Contemporary rap artists whose music is not an attempt at resistance have largely not only latched onto the values of America but actively promote them and stress winning and success at all costs. These concepts are typically operationalized as acquiring copious amounts of wealth and the conspicuous consumption of it.

Kopano (2002) notes an appearance by rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg on Saturday Night Live in 1994. After Snoop performed “Gin & Juice” and covered Slick Rick’s “Lodi Dodi” wearing a Tommy Hilfiger shirt, sales jumped \$93 million the next year. While Kopano views this event in the context of rappers resistance and rebellion through “keeping it real” and being emulated in larger American society, Snoop essentially served as a wholly uncompensated pitchman that drove business to a mainstream American company.

Keeping in mind Negus’ (1999) research showing rap representatives being denied access to control over the capital they were generating for businesses, Billboard magazine (Paoletta 2006) described how companies profit off of rap artists and product references in hip hop, but rarely enter into any kind of formal agreement with them to share profits. This illustrates that as the language used in rap music often features references to well known products, the companies benefit while the artist that uses the reference does not.

Kopano notes the power of the spoken and written word as a threat to white management and society in general. In the last 10-15 years the most notable protests against hip hop or its artists have been protests against white rapper Eminem for his controversial but not progressively political lyrical content. New words and terms that are created are used by hip hop artists, but primarily as currency in the capitalist system and the dominant ideologies of the day, not tools of subversion. The vast majority of these creations are in concert with and not in opposition to the established order or system. As an example, Snoop Dogg’s aforementioned “izzle” terminology was created as a novelty, a foundation by which he could differentiate his musical product and build upon it until the idea gets old, if it ever does. It was not something Snoop used as a method for subverting the dominant culture or society.

The vast majority of new terminology in hip hop is used in conjunction with prevailing culture and its' capitalist ideas and structure. Doing anything for money is stressed and a criminal element and the unsavory elements that come along with it are supported by the hip hop culture because the guiding principle of the hip hop structure is ultimately an artistic expression of making money. In rap there is typically a straightforward expression that makes it clear that trying to make money is the goal, not artistic expression solely or cultural resistance. Thus in hip hop there are many slang words and phrases for guns and weapons and many words for money. If as Kopano suggests, a "guerilla rhetoric" was being developed and used by hip hop, with language being used as a means to subvert and attack the dominant culture and ideas in America, there should be evidence of a collection of terms that are being created by artists to serve this purpose. Instead, the newly created linguistic inventions and terms that are brought into being by the hip hop subculture are mainly focused on subject matter that fits directly with dominant ideologies and ideas of American life and goals.

While male members of the hip hop subculture are known to refer to one another as "God" and less frequently to females as "Earths", borrowing from Black Nationalist terminology, it is far more frequent that they use derogatory terms instead, in rap music. Additionally, the influx of new terminology is implemented in songs that while positioned as oppositional are only so on a surface or shock level and essentially serve as a reinforcement of the accepted principles and practices of capitalist society in America. Kopano (2002) contends that "By holding a mirror to society, rap stands as a rhetoric of resistance primarily to issues of race but also to issues of class and sex (gender)." Instead, rap and the hip hop subculture perpetuate the values that frequent corporate America: individualism, sexism, homophobia,

materialism, conspicuous consumption and violence. Neal (1999) agrees that while hip hop presents itself as oppositional, it essentially is not:

Despite the demonization of hip-hop in the mainstream and its arguably oppositional potential for black youth, the hip-hop community seems to embrace values that would be found in both traditional African-American communities and mainstream culture. (p.164)

Hip Hop's structural similarities to capitalistic enterprise have played a part in how it was commodified and packaged by the dominant culture for consumption. Its' solid place within the culture industries, with figures that represent rap having minimal power, nullify any attempts at true societal opposition. The ideologies in hip hop and the lure of the market lead to hip hop culture backing the corporations and institutions that bolster the culture industry, even as hip hop culture is viewed as resistant or one of alienation.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Why did the rap element of hip hop flourish while deejaying took a back seat, breakdancing largely vanished from popular culture and graffiti art drifted to high art? I argue it is because Rap is the most capitalistic element of the four. As technology becomes more and more advanced within capitalism, Rap's already capitalistic processes and accepted and cherished procedures and practices above and beyond graffiti, deejaying and breakdancing are what has allowed it to mesh with capitalism even though its messages often appear as attempts to directly oppose it. Graffiti art was competitive. Artists would spray paint over one another's designs or compete to paint over a coveted subway car, but rappers compete in more ways – battling on record and with freestyles, through formal marketing strategies in the marketplace and through informal practices like bragging about lyrical prowess. Rappers' practices also share more with capitalism. Breakdancing does not spawn a significant amount of slang or hold within it a growth element, doesn't provide business investing opportunities or exhibit a lot of the capitalistic tendencies Rap does as described previously in this paper. Deejaying has been the closest to Rap with regard to capitalistic elements and longevity in the public eye. A vital part of Rap music, deejays have capitalistic properties like the vocal brands they embed in their music and the facilitation of Rap's relentless use of technology and samples.

Advanced capitalistic society needs advanced communications systems to enable capitalism to function at an ever-increasing pace. The telephone and the internet transfer vital information that businesses use to make decisions. Spinning off of the tradition of freestyling, Rap artists have been able to quickly adapt to rapidly changing situations or trends in popular culture or current news headlines. A recent Houston Chronicle article noted rap artists for their

ability to quickly come up with concepts, lyrics and songs on an advanced timetable (Peralta 2006). Rap's synchronicity with capitalism, Rapitalism, continues to allow it to keep its place in popular culture.

Rap to the Future

An important component of an exploratory thesis like mine is the offering of suggestions for further research. If hip hop is ineffective as a subculture that can be oppositional because it is embedded within the culture industry and its structure leads to easy appropriation by capitalistic enterprises, is it possible for it to disengage and present true alternatives? Future research should examine the methods by which corporations deny hip hop participants access to the capital they generate.

Race and gender exclusion play parts in hip hop as well. While much research has analyzed women in rap and the multicultural quality of the hip hop culture, there is currently only one prominent female producer, Missy Elliott, and no prominent white female emcees besides the up-and-coming artist Jay-Z signed, Lady Sovereign. The white female (often presented as the ideal woman by the corporate world and American capitalistic enterprise) is used by dominant culture the most to sell every product imaginable. If a white female emcee were to express the oppositional ideas that emerge in resistance to the culture industries, would hip hop then transcend the barriers of the culture industry and capitalism? In accordance with the idea of Rap as a capitalistic entity and my argument that slang terms taken from the

neighborhood streets comprise Rap's capital or growth element, is the lack of any prominent white female emcee thus a function of cultural norms about which artists can retain credibility while using slang? Currently Lady Sovereign, originally from Britain, has an album that was released October 31, 2006. The video for her lead single "Love Me or Hate Me" hit number 1 on MTV's "TRL". Britain's Rap is termed "Grime" and Lady Sovereign often uses British slang. A comparative analysis of other white female emcees lyrics with Lady Sovereign's might reveal answers to these questions and reveal her true potential to be a groundbreaking artist.

Marcuse (1964) suggests that the end of technological rationality in capitalism will come when technology advances to a superior level that allows us to essentially "unplug". Future research should examine the maximization of rap or a perceived superior level that rap can advance to where white females have a voice and a significant presence. Will processes emerge that similarly provide a body of work that then ends the genre?

A final concept most famously explored by Henry Louis Gates Jr. is what is termed signifying (Gates Jr. 1988). Signifying refers to the trend in Black art and thus rap of artists referring to or "shouting out" other rappers. Rappers often recite other rappers lyrics in a tradition that typically is a show of respect but can also be used to disrespect as well, or just make reference to another rap artist's work. A great number of these references in song require a substantial understanding and familiarity of hip hop culture to pick them up when artists deliver them. I have attempted to show the similarities and synchronous aspects of Rap in regards to capitalism. Does the practice of signifying relate to a similar practice in capitalism? Businesses don't give their biggest competitors favorable mentions in commercials or product advertisements. Signifying is one of Rap's time honored traditions. Because it is typically used as a sign of respect and only indirectly helps the rapper performing it since many Rap listeners

miss the reference, the practice does not appear to have capitalistic properties. However, I believe we have seen that the appearance of anti-capitalism can be deceiving. More research is needed to locate signifying within rapitalism.

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