

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

A

**Sessions From the Big Smoke:
Rap, Race and Class in London**

by

Raymond Codrington

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
New York.

2001

UMI Number: 3024775

Copyright 2001 by
Codrington, Raymond George

All rights reserved.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3024775

Copyright 2001 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

© 2001

Raymond Codrington

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Sept. 10, 2001
Date

Leith Mullins
Chair of the Examining Committee

Sept. 10, 2001
Date

Kouse D. Linnika
Executive Officer

Prof. Jane Schneider

Prof. Donald Robotham

Prof. Robin D.G. Kelley (O.R.)

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

Sessions From the Big Smoke:
Rap, Race and Class in London

by

Raymond George Codrington

Adviser: Professor Leith Mullings

This dissertation addresses the way that race and class are incorporated in the practice of rap music in London among primarily black and other groups of working class people. The dissertation seeks to look at how issues of race and class are treated within London's multicultural context. The work pays close attention to changes in the racial and class composition of the rap community since its inception in London during the mid 1980's and throughout its subsequent development. Popular accounts state that rap in London has moved from a cultural form primarily practiced by people of African descent in the 1980's to one that is currently practiced not only by this group but also by other working and middle class populations.

This research examines the practice of rap as it relates to larger issues of race and class. The results of the

research address debates in anthropology, sociology and cultural studies concerning the practice of popular culture and its relation to race and class as they are linked to issues of power and choice. The thesis advances an examination of the practice of rap as an opportunity to examine the way that race and class impact cultural interaction within multicultural settings. Essentially, I ask how members of the rap community negotiate the construction of racial and cultural difference.

Acknowledgements

An enormous amount of encouragement and support from many sources enriched my graduate career. Graciously, I benefited from the presence of those who I wish to thank at this time:

Prof. Leith Mullings whose support and frankness brought a critical perspective to my work. The remainder of my committee, Donald Robotham, Jane Schneider and Robin D.G. Kelley for comments that made my work stronger.

The Ph.D. Program in Anthropology and Louise Lennihan for providing me with an office space during the bulk of my writing.

The groups that funded my research in its initial and latter stages: CUNY (Humana Fellowship), Institute for the Study of World Politics (Dorothy Danforth Dissertation Research Grant) CUNY (Magnet Dissertation Writing Grant).

Dr. Alaka Wali and CCUC for their patience.

My mother Antihia for lending me her tenacity and determination. Without failure you believed and I would not have made it without you. My father Clovis for his critiques which kept me level. My siblings, Paulette, Jennifer, Byron and Ian, much love. From the UK to the US we remain family. The Abrahams family, the Hudson family and Gloria Prescod for your encouragement.

My people, Marilynne, Melanie, Nadeen, Ana, Tracy, Robert, Rory, Scott and Sophie. Thank you for accompanying me. Gretchen, thank you for the read.

Heather Clarke and Ellen DeRiso, for countless reminders and kind words.

The London side, Bev, Anthony, Ade, Dobie, Roba, Vanessa and Valentine. Respect every time for the hook-ups and jokes.

Those that took time to speak to me during my research. Thank you for your patience and interest, Cuba, Chester P. Hackenbush, Farma G, Mongo, Skinnyman, Intense, M.U.D. Family, BURY Crew, Ty, MK, Blak Twang, Pogo, Dirty Rat, Peter,

Maestro, Rodney P, Sindecut, Dexter, Fusion, Big Ted, Aki Nawaz, DJ 279,12 Stone, MC Mello, Cookie Crew, Misbehavior, DJ Bizness, Mark B, Blade, Andy Cowan, Big Kwam, Funky DL, Funkin' Pussy, Cane. If I did not mention you, you still know who you are.

Prof. Stephen Nugent for arranging access to the Goldsmiths College Library.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Research Background and Methods	34
Chapter 2 Movement and Translation	68
Chapter 3 Rap in London	97
Chapter 4 Blacks in London Rap	156
Chapter 5 Whites in London Rap	212
Conclusion	254
Bibliography and Discography	282

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

"I live for this music man, this is real music ya know. It's got a heart and a culture of its own that bears no resemblance to anything else on this planet...hip hop¹." These are the opening lines from an interviewee's album *19 Long Time: Live from the Big Smoke*. The rapper on the album, Taipanic, is a male in his mid 20's. Like other black males in the study, hip hop culture to him is incorporated into his life through rapping. His style of rapping has been developed in the UK through contact with his relatives in the New York and Virginia areas. Taipanic, would visit these relatives in the US and return with American phrasing and vocabulary that he used in his form of rap in London. The accent that he raps in is reflective of his Jamaican and Nigerian parents and his growing up in

¹ Hip hop culture consists of four elements. Rap is the vocal element, dee jaying involves the playing and technical manipulation of records, graffiti is aerosol art, and b-boy/b-girl(ing), otherwise known as break dancing is the dance component of hip hop culture. Toop (1984b), Hager (1984) and Nelson and Gonzales (1991) provide useful

London. In this way blacks negotiate several sources of diasporic culture--the UK, the West Indies, Africa and the US, forming them into a black British identity. As Paul Gilroy astutely states,

The cultures of this group have been produced in a syncretic pattern in which the styles and forms of the Caribbean have been reworked and re-inscribed in the novel context of modern Britain's own untidy ensembles of regional and class orientated conflicts (Gilroy 1993:3).

The idea that culture is created under specific conditions should not be lost. When this process is examined in the context of London's multicultural milieu the question becomes one of how race and class are implicated in discussions of multiculturalism. In addition, how are ideas of hybridity as discussed by Gilroy (2000), Hall (1992) and Bhabba (1994; 1988) treated by working class populations? These scholars view hybridity as an on-going process of identity creation that emerges from a position of cultural and social marginality--of somehow not being fully integrated into a given society. For Bhabba hybridity represents "a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an in-between 'reality'" (Bhabba 1994:13). Here, identities and culture are not bounded

discussions on hip hop culture's four elements. At the present time, rap is considered the most visible element.

units but instead form and re-form as a result of continuous contact. In this sense, "pure" identities are lost as different groups are brought together. These identities are created from a "Third Space" which serves as an alternative area or position from which to de-stabilize past narratives of representation. This space ensures that, "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (Bhabba 1988:21). In reference to black Britons, this represents a way to discuss their identity and experiences in anti-essential terms whereby the analytical focus is framed in terms of heterogeneity versus homogeneity--the individual versus the group. In this discussion, I explore the ways in which processes of hybridity affect working class people in the rap community in London.

The Early Period (1948-1966)

Before discussing rap in detail, I will provide a background that situates the black British presence in an historical and political context in the post World War II period. To do so, I rely heavily on the discourse surrounding race and immigration, which was an important

factor in coloring the experiences of blacks. This period does not signal the initial stages of blacks' entry into the UK, but does mark a significant period in the history of race discourse.

In the mid 1940s, immigrants from the Caribbean came to Britain to fill employment needs. Usually Caribbeans were offered jobs in the manufacturing and service areas such as transportation (London Transport) and the National Health Service (NHS) that had low pay and poor working conditions. West Indians were steered into these "essential" industries because of the British need for laborers and of racist tendencies linked to denying this group access to better paying jobs by not recognizing immigrants' employment qualifications and not allowing them entry into job training programs (Harris 1993). The weak position of blacks in the labor market was accompanied by discrimination in housing, schooling, and police treatment (Katznelson 1976). The discrimination directed towards blacks was a result of ideological and political maneuvering that manifested itself on several different levels. In turn, blacks became racialized in a particular way that conflated race with cultural and economic inferiority. In this instance, the process of racialization

was achieved through state sponsored immigration policy and related discourse. Consequently,

The construction of race was not merely social but profoundly political in the sense that the state generated and authorized race categories as common sense devices for the allocation and distribution of social and material resources (Carter, Harris and Halpern 1996:153).

This resulted in blacks occupying an inferior position within the labor market and general society.

An additional reason why Caribbean people came to Britain stemmed from legislation of the period that prevented them from going elsewhere. The 1948 Nationality Act gave colonial subjects the right to migrate and settle in Great Britain. In reference to Jamaican migration, and its relationship to Britain one author writes,

Britain's centuries long domination of the Island, and the peculiarly strong English influence in the educational system, gave Jamaicans a strong sense of identity with Britain (Lawrence 1974:18).

In the context of Britain's colonial relationship with the Caribbean, Britain was framed as the "mother" country. This meant that migration to Britain was seen as less problematic due to the pre-existing colonial contact. In addition, the passage of the McCarran Act of 1952 in the US limited Caribbean migration into the United States. This "pushed" potential Caribbean immigrants to the UK.

Fearing the increased entry of blacks into Britain, the first "official" demands for immigration control in the twentieth century came in the series of Commonwealth Immigration Acts of 1962, 1968 and 1972. Concerns about being "overrun" by blacks were expressed earlier in the 1950s, but this sentiment was somewhat muted because Britain was at that time undergoing its project of decolonization in Africa and the Caribbean.

To varying degrees, these acts restricted immigration from the Commonwealth nations of the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia. British officials cited the racial and cultural incompatibility of Commonwealth immigrants with British society as the reason for these restrictions. Political pundits and citizens who opposed black migration to the UK stressed the UK's inability to incorporate certain cultural and racial groups. When concerns of being overwhelmed by black immigrants were articulated, however, they seemed to reflect racist sentiments rather than concern about actual numbers of Caribbean immigrants. In fact, between 1950 and 1955 approximately 36,000 black immigrants entered Great Britain. In contrast, 250,000 Southern Irish and other European immigrants entered during the same time but were not subject to the same political rhetoric (Carter, Harris

and Joshi 1993).

Nearly a decade later in 1965, the United States relaxed its immigration policy with the Hart-Cellar Immigration Reform Act which loosened the restrictions on Caribbean migration to the United States. Between 1964 and 1970, 114,921 immigrants from the English speaking Caribbean came to the United States. This was a significant increase from the 27,424 immigrants who migrated in the years between 1960 and 1965. By 1966, the year that unofficially marks the end of mass Caribbean migration to Great Britain, it is estimated that 60 percent of the Caribbean population in Britain came from Jamaica (Rose 1969).

The infusion of immigrants into Britain was believed to increase tension between immigrant and native populations. In the 1970s racist discourse continued as notions of biological inferiority (Stepan 1982) and aliens over-populating Great Britain gave way to more subtle forms of anti-immigrant discourse. Although this new era's rhetoric of exclusion produced the same racist policies, the way in which anti-immigrant sentiment was phrased relied more on the construction of a dichotomy between foreigner and national seen in the relation between race,

nation, and culture. In earlier discussions of black immigration to the UK, racial and biological differences between immigrants and the British were advanced as the reason to guard against black immigration. In this instance, the culture of black people was viewed as alien to that of the British. As a result, this group could not be assimilated in British society.

The cultural realm was seen as a critical sphere that could not withstand mixture between foreigners and Britons as this interaction posed a threat to Britain's national character and culture. The idea of difference between "races" was seen as a naturally occurring cultural difference. Subsequently, racist policies directed at blacks became viewed as acceptable because these groups were by nature unlike the British. This is termed "common sense" racism. In this instance culture became an area where these differences were rationalized. Here,

Blacks are pathologized once via their association with the 'cultures of deprivation' of the decaying 'inner cities' and again as the bearers of specifically black cultures (Lawrence 1982:56).

In another reading of race in the European context, Etienne Balibar (1991) addresses the notion of cultural incompatibility between the host nation and immigrants in a wider European sense. In this article, what he calls

differentialist racism describes the link between race, culture and nation. It is viewed as

A racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but only the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions; in short it is what...has rightfully been called a differentialist racism (Balibar 1991:21).

Stolcke (1993) captures the idea of cultural incompatibility in the British context during and after the 1970s. Here, the reliance on cultural distinctions to rationalize discrimination is called a culturalist rhetoric that

Is different from racism in that it reifies culture conceived as a compact, bounded, localized and historically rooted set of traditions and values transmitted through the generations by drawing on an ideological repertoire that dates back to the contradictory 19th century conception of nation state (Stolcke 1993:4).

The ideas of cultural incompatibility and the social unrest that would accompany the presence of immigrants were present throughout the debates concerning immigration controls.

Background Population Data

Postcolonial movements to Britain² as well as London's role as a cultural and economic nexus in the Western world have made Britain an increasingly diverse country thus complicating issues of race and class. There can be no mistake that London is a multicultural city. Overall, the population of Britain is approximately 55 million while the population of London is 7 million people. In Britain, there are 3.3 million blacks, or people who do not classify themselves as white. "Black" people make up 6.2% of the population of England, 1.5% of Wales and 1.3% of the population of Scotland (CRE Fact Sheet 1997). Interestingly, half of all the UK's ethnic minority population lives in London. Among the fastest growing minority groups are black Africans and Bangladeshis. These groups are projected to increase by about 25 percent over the next ten years. In all, there are 37 different migrant communities with populations of more than 10,000 in London (2000 London Research Centre Demographic and Statistical Studies).

For blacks in the UK, economic and political circumstances have created an unfavorable class position (Foner 1987; Small 1994). The rigidity of class

² For historical discussions of immigration in UK see Fryer

distinctions remains apparent in the UK. Daye (1994) asserts that because the black population is a relatively new group, it is somewhat difficult to define analogous class distinctions in relation to whites. In the view of this scholar, blacks have not had the same amount of time as whites to reproduce an entrenched middle class. However, segments of the black population are experiencing occupational mobility. In particular, the most important fields of employment for Caribbean men have been in transport, communication, distribution, engineering, and construction industries. Black African males are more likely to be represented in service industries which include more "white collar" jobs such as education, business services, and health. The highest percentages of Caribbean women work in education and health services. The numbers in this field might be indicative of the populations' recruitment into the National Health Service (NHS) (1991 Census Statistical Data Archive).

A disproportionate number of blacks are placed on the lower rungs of the UK's class structure that relegates them to poor housing conditions. As one author states, "black minority groups in Britain are over represented in the

(1989; 1988) Shyllon (1982) and Winston and Harris (1993).

poorest urban locations and are likely to live in some of the most deprived housing" (Philips 1998:1688). In fact, 36% of black Caribbeans and 41% of black Africans live in government subsidized housing called council housing while 21% of whites live in this type of housing (1991 Census). The topic of council housing will be further discussed in the next chapter.

The above mentioned racial, ethnic and class composition and consequent diversity in the UK calls into question ideas of Britishness. London enjoys a reputation of being a multicultural city and as a result, London is seen as the melting pot experiment that is going right. Seemingly, cultural exchange and change in London appears to happen at a rapid pace and high frequency. Consequently, the idea of borrowing, intermixture and a resultant cultural hybridity has come to define London's cultural character.

London and Cultural Interaction

In London, the idea of mixture can be seen in the relationship between black British and black American popular culture as black Britons adopt and appropriate the symbols of black America and the Caribbean as well as the

cultural influences from other ethnic and racial groups in the city. In my observation, to be black and British is to embody the scope of the black diaspora. As Stuart Hall states,

A distinctive feature of the new black British identity is the extent to which it has been americanized. Its ideal images, its stylistic references are very powerfully black American. Even though the style may be indigenized, given a British home grown stamp, all leads come from Afro-America. The lines of black transatlantic communication grow ever more complex and intense. And that too has consequences for the relation to blackness (Hall 2000:129).

It is here that rap comes to the fore. Is it possible that rap is a means by which blacks and others distance themselves from the jingoistic ideas of Britishness that once characterized Britain? In a related sense, do blacks in London tap into ideas of blackness that are globally associated with the iconography and relationship between African American cultural expression and rap music?

How do rap, race and class intersect in this multicultural environment? An important concern of my research was the extent to which involvement in rap was seen as a way to break down racial and ethnic barriers that existed between groups. Was the participation in rap reflective of London's diverse racial and class dynamic or was it in fact based on the very categories of race and

class that multiculturalism is supposed to address and remedy?

Current discussions of hybridity are an on-going theme found in ideas of cultural mixture and formation reflected in music, literary circles, popular press, and elements of the intelligentsia. This amicable form of hybridity is enthusiastically embraced by much of London's intellectual and cultural elite. An example of the fusion of cultures in London is evident in musical bands and artists that comprise the Asian "underground" such as Asian Dub Foundation (ADF). These groups are seen as examples of hybrid music production as they incorporate several types of music such as traditional South Asian musical influences, reggae, rap and rock into their compositions. Such artists are hailed as representing hybrid musical forms that are reflective of the new multicultural Britain. Zadie Smith provides another example of hybridity in the novel White Teeth. She skillfully tells the story of the interpersonal relations that develop among people, regardless of racial and ethnic background. The characters find themselves brought together in a very local, almost socially isolated existence in London. The author emphasizes the day-to-day activities of the people and the

way in which unique experiences are born out of seemingly mundane circumstances. Smith's fluid writing style moves the story along at a swift pace. Her command of the various dialects and behaviors of her West Indian, British, and South Asian characters sets her apart as an accomplished and effective writer. The characters are somehow able to remove themselves from the everyday pressures and biases of London and instead focus on their personal relationships in their London neighborhood. In yet another example of cultural mixture author Yasmin Alibhai-Brown celebrates London's multicultural milieu in the recent New York Times article entitled "A Magic Carpet Ride of Cultures in London: On the City's New Arts Scene, Racial Barriers Crumble Outsiders Crowd Inside" (June 25, 2000). Brown focuses on the diversity of London in terms of its frequency of inter-racial dating, popularity of "ethnic" foods such as curries, as well as the recognition of black arts and entertainment. In this account of hybridity and others, the contributions of people of African and Asian descent to the cultural composition of London are emphasized. Participation in the cultural realm is the way in which these groups have come to take part in London's development. In this article, the inclusiveness of

multiculturalism is stressed. Interestingly, the disparities based on racial and class marginalization that prevent the participation of black working class groups in wider multicultural contexts such as the political arena are touched on only briefly as an after-thought in the final paragraphs of the article and less critically in her book Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain (2000).

London's hybridity is characteristic of the relations discussed by Gilroy (2000) and Back (1996). Gilroy (2000) opposes ideas of racial essentialism that reify modern notions of the relationship between race and culture. He attempts to move ideas of race away from biologized notions as seen in the black body. Gilroy views the cosmopolitan city as an arena for the potential dismissal of race. He comments on this by focusing on "the prospective significance of cosmopolitan culture in the erasure of "race" (Gilroy 2000:282). For Back (1996), London is a multicultural place where racism exists, but where this can be challenged through the practice of popular culture. London is a cultural intermezzo where cultures combine to form new types of urban cultures. Back's work is concerned with

Attempting to recognize the presence of new, and indeed old, racisms, but equally it is concerned with exploring the degree to which emergent "new ethnicities" are reworking the terms of racial inclusion and exclusion (Back 1996:10).

Interestingly, Back sees popular culture as an arena where syncretic new urban cultures are being practiced. The notion of an increasing cultural homogeneity is apparent in these views of multiculturalism, in which London seems to be moving towards a more unitary culture.

Among these discussions of multiculturalism, Back is the most critical of and most cognizant of the processes and relationships of power among the groups involved. However, my emphasis differs from these writers in that I am interested in taking a closer look at what this liberal form of multiculturalism means for blacks and poor people. I am especially concerned with how these ideas incorporate concepts of creolization and cultural mixture (Hannerz 1997; 1991). Finally, how does the way in which working class groups, especially blacks, experience cultural interaction relate to maintaining or challenging the pre-existing boundaries of London's multicultural society and hybrid cultural interactions?

Overt racism in the UK appears to be less virulent now than in the past. Currently political rhetoric of exclusion

is directed at such groups as asylum seekers from Eastern Europe. For the time being, the right wing threat against blacks may have slightly subsided³. Meanwhile, among West Indians and South Asians of the current generation, memories of colonialism and immigration to Britain have become distant, if not non-existent. However, there remains a tension between calling oneself one of the many hyphenated British categories and feeling or being treated as British. London is unique in its racial composition and issues of race and class continue to greatly affect the city's residents. The question then becomes how does a liberal multiculturalism address race and class based discrimination? And what does this multicultural project involve?

The Multicultural Project

In essence, I was concerned with how race and class were reflected and addressed in rap in "liberal multicultural" settings. Here, I use the term liberal multiculturalism as discussed by historian Manning Marable. He proposes that

³ I stress slightly, because the bombings of the Brixton Market and Brick Lane in 1999 show that the right wing can still be very active. These bombings were undertaken by white supremacists targeted at black and South Asian populations respectively.

liberal multiculturalism is

Genuinely concerned with aesthetics, ideology, curriculum theory and cultural criticism. Liberal multiculturalism is broadly democratic as an intellectual approach for the deconstruction of race. It does not adequately conceive of itself as praxis, a theory that seeks to transform the reality of unequal power relations. It deliberately emphasizes aesthetics over economics, art over politics. It attempts to articulate the perceived interests of minority groups to increase their influence within the existing mainstream. In short, liberal multiculturalism is "liberalism" within the framework of cultural diversity and pluralism (Marable 1995:120).

In particular, I am interested in examining the contrast between liberal multiculturalism as presented by the media and intelligentsia and the way in which it is practiced in rap communities. Asad (1990) adds an analysis of the relations of power to the examination of multiculturalism. He suggests that in advocating a multicultural stance, British society inherently disallows the existence of difference. In this case, difference represents anything that is not "British". He states that in this situation "the problematic connection lies between learning *about* difference and learning to *become* different; and as in all learning, that connection is fraught with questions of power and authority" (Asad 1990:471). Similarly, Turner (1994) specifically calls for the examination of power relations by anthropologists in

multicultural interactions. Marable and Asad interestingly raise critical issues about what multiculturalism entails and how it takes place. Both questions are of critical importance for considering the practice of rap in relation to multicultural contexts.

The Study of Rap

Let it be said that "everyone" is an expert on rap music and hip hop culture. Rarely did I find people who did not have an opinion about it. As a researcher this was both invigorating and frustrating. From street scholars who do not have academic backgrounds but have a firm grounding in the history and practices of rap, to the most technical academic deconstructionist--all see rap and hip hop as their own. As a result of this a feeling of ownership of rap and hip hop pervade. And maybe it should, but maybe it should not. Regardless, the research topic of rap and hip hop brings up some provocative points about the role of the academic in studying and/or working with it.

When anthropologists learn that I study rap they frequently recount seeing rap in the various areas in which they did their fieldwork. It is fascinating to hear this, but I wonder whether, as anthropologists, we should be

surprised. We frequently talk about globalization, identity and culture in our work, but seem surprised or thrilled to find that rap exists in all parts of the world. I appreciate the comments but it seems ironic that, although anthropology as a discipline expressly deals with the cultural practices of groups, it has been until recently relatively slow to address popular culture in general and hip hop more specifically as a field of study. Ethnomusicologist Robert Walser (1993) recognizes the difficulties in gaining acceptance for the study of music in an academic context. He asserts, "in the academy, heavy metal (along with rap) remain the dark "Other" of classical preserves of sweetness and light" (Walser 1993:103). The dubious acceptance of rap studies also comes from members of the hip hop community who, like other types of informants, are wary of researchers and what will be done with ethnographic material.

At certain points, however, researchers have had no choice but to take notice and devote a serious analysis to global and domestic practices of rap and hip hop which at the time of this writing have been spreading for a quarter of a century. Despite these instances, hip hop culture remains a somewhat ignored area of study. This may be

partially due to the view of rap as a fad, a purely consumer culture. In addition, lack of access to the rap population might prevent people from considering research in this area. However, through the use of ethnographic methods, anthropology can offer key insights into the practice of rap and hip hop by focusing on the creation of culture as well as the relationships that are developed out of this practice.

Over time, the research in London developed into a much larger project, taking on not only the processes that are occurring in the development of popular culture, but also what is happening with the people involved in this culture. When I told my informants that I was interested in how race and class influence the practice of rap they were surprised that this could be an area of study. Blacks especially saw this as an opportunity to bring attention to the ways in which they were incorporated into London's cultural, as well as racial and class, sphere. I would say that this was conveyed to me with a sense of great urgency. The stories that the informants told me about rap were often allegories about much larger issues related to being black and poor in London.

I felt that being less than 30 years of age and of

African descent gave me access to a different type of dialogue, especially in the areas related to race. Unlike previous social science research that I had conducted in urban areas through environmental psychology, my racial identity worked in my favor. Previously, I had worked on a research project in inner city areas. The work dealt with multiple stress factors and the impact on children and their parents in East Harlem in New York City (Krenichyn, Saegert and Evans in press). As a black male researcher I regularly interacted with informants in the context of hip hop and was readily accepted. In my other research experiences, being a black male in communities that were already suspicious of what was presented as a hard science university study was more of a hindrance. Doors and information were much less open in this context. In those instances I was often seen as an arm of a research group. In my dissertation research, I was able to retain a degree of autonomy and to represent only my own interests in a way that was impossible to exercise when working for a research organization.

In many research situations the role of the ethnographer becomes more than that of a researcher as personal relations develop with informants. This is one of

the dangers if one sees oneself as an "insider". It quickly became clear that the fact that I lived in America and had familial ties to England put me in a unique research position but I could not be so pretentious as to think that I was, thereby, an "insider". This became obvious when I began to ask mundane questions that were perceived as having little relevance to my informants who were engrossed in the production and practice of rap and were more interested in "doing" rap and "being" hip hop than talking about it. In addition, my class position became an issue. Experiences with my informants were further tempered by my role as a researcher, which precluded certain forms of racial or class solidarity. I lived in similar locations as my informants, but I knew that I would return to New York upon completion of my fieldwork. My informants knew this as well. The fact that I had options that they did not created obvious divisions. For example though my first home in London was in an estate, through most of the research period, I was able to conduct my research and leave the housing estate at the end of the day. In addition, in some cases, I was able to attend events that they could not because I could pay an entrance charge. At times, I met contacts through my work

that could gain me free entrance into places and events.

Most of the participants in my study were from working class backgrounds. They did not read academic journals, newspapers or take part in a discourse about the development of rap and the politics of multiculturalism. In turn, their take on cultural interaction and multiculturalism was different than that of academic discourse.

Hip Hop Culture

Hip hop is a personal matter to the informants who participated in the study. They feel strongly about its practice, development and representation. For them, rap music and hip hop culture more generally are their main point of cultural reference. This means that rap influences the way that they dress, speak and interact with others within and outside of the hip hop community. More than anything hip hop has become a lifestyle that permeates many areas of this group's existence. Far from being merely music that they listen to, this group sees themselves as living in a particular way that heavily incorporates hip hop. In this regard, my use of the word culture is similar to that of Raymond Williams (1977). He defines culture as

"the independent and abstract noun, which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" (Williams 1977:90). My perspective concerning hip hop includes a definite sense of agency in the creation and definition of this culture as I analyze it in the context of non-elites.

When I use the term hip hop culture I include other practices besides music. For organizational purposes, I have created three inter-related parts of hip hop culture: consumption, demonstration, and the philosophical domain. Consumption implies a passive involvement in hip hop and focuses on purchasing markers of hip hop culture. For example, dressing in current styles of hip hop related clothing that are made by particular manufacturers or labels such as MECCA, FUBU, AVIREX and reading a specific and limited number of mainstream publications such as the British rap journal, *Hip Hop Connection* and American rap magazine *The Source*. Demonstration involves actions that illustrate a knowledge or active involvement in hip hop culture. This is seen in people's awareness of issues such as: concern with the skill level and style of particular rappers, acquaintance with the content of rap songs, the production skill and techniques of certain producers, and

knowing the record labels that particular artists recorded with. Demonstration also involves participation in debates addressing the differences in mainstream and non-mainstream rap music as well as the future trajectory of rap music. In addition, demonstration includes regularly writing lyrics for rap songs and performing them, possessing a knowledge base and engaging in debates about particular mcs⁴ and their influence. An interest in hip hop media and arts such as theatre and dance, participating in events like open mics⁵, and self-identifying as part of hip hop culture round out demonstration. The philosophical domain involves incorporating ideals that are in place in hip hop into one's daily life. Underlying the previous three categories, it is the most important and basic to hip hop. Ideals such as originality, competition, ingenuity, determination, resourcefulness and the desire to represent oneself through hip hop are central to the philosophical aspect of hip hop culture.

This is not a check list for hip hop culture, but my attempt to outline major aspects of its practice as I witnessed it. People in my study embodied various aspects

⁴ MC is another term for rapper. It means master of ceremonies or mic (microphone) controller.

⁵ Open mics are spaces set up in venues to serve as forums

of these categories in different ways. Like race and class, the categories are contingent on outside factors and remain fluid. For example, at times informants merely consumed an aspect of hip hop culture while at other times they were involved in demonstration by performing a rap song. This does not imply that they are consumers before they are artists, instead it means that hip hop culture is a complex culture that requires people to participate in it in different ways at different times. I also use the term hip hop to refer to the wider community or industry in which rappers find themselves, ranging from the business aspect to fan support and interaction. I do not suggest that all of my informants had all of these characteristics. Instead, these are markers or points of reference in viewing involvement in hip hop culture as more than a form of consumerism.

In a similar way to Finnegan (1989), I examine rap in a particular social context as I treat issues of cultural mixture in rap in London in two interconnected ways. Both of these focus on basic questions concerning the relationships that develop between members of the rap community. The first deals with the content of the music

for rapping, spoken word or other verbal activities.

which I call the musical side of rap. This involves the influences involved in the music, the styles in which people rap and the content of what they rap about. The second aspect is the everyday practice of rap which I refer to as the social side of rap. The social side includes examination of the context in which the music is produced, those with whom the music is produced and enjoyed as well as the types of relations that are created out of the everyday practice of rap. In the research, I treated the musical and social as related aspects in the examination of rap.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter one provides the setting for the study. The main participants are introduced and background information on them concerning factors that influence their participation in rap is provided. In this context, I focus on information such as the informant's race, class, occupations, and educational level. In addition, this chapter provides the local context for the areas in which I studied and includes the research methodology.

In chapter two I provide a general overview of the hip hop literature. This chapter also includes theoretical

issues that relate to the global spread and practice of rap as discussed by authors such as Perkins (1996) and Rose (1994a), who recognize the importance of rap as a global art form and culture. I am especially interested in the way that race and class are treated in these works. In this chapter, I also discuss the commodification of rap and the issue of authenticity in rap.

Chapter three gives a more ethnographically based description of the rap community. I give a brief historical introduction to rap in London, examining the lyrics, rap styles and racial and class dynamics. I also demonstrate some of the practices currently involved in rap in London. The chapter discusses issues that deal more specifically with the way that rap is practiced as a non-mainstream or "underground" art form. Essentially, this chapter sets the stage for the discussion of the way that race and class are implicated in the practice of rap in London. The chapter also highlights the inter and intra race and class dynamics of the rap community. In turn, this and subsequent chapters are a way to look at some of the complexities that are involved in defining race and class in rap.

Because much of the dissertation focuses on black Britons in London, chapter four is an examination of

blacks' practice of rap in London. I discuss this as a way to talk about relations between racial groups in the hip hop community. In this context, I look at the processes involved in the creation of black British identity and its intersection with black American and West Indian culture as discussed by Gilroy (2000; 1993). On certain levels, his "black Atlantic" formulation captures some of the processes and difficulties that are involved in the definition and creation of black British identity. Although "race" is not exclusively a "black" issue, I want to look at this in relation to blacks in London. In addition, I discuss what I see as a paradox found in the practice of popular culture in which blacks are caught. This paradox involves the view of rap as an inclusive practice involving different racial groups while at the same having a particular significance to black diasporic populations. I ask whether race plays a role in the practice of popular culture. If so, how do groups perceive their own participation and role in rap?

Chapter five examines the practice of rap among my white informants. I look at the way in which race and class impacts their decisions as I examine the influence of rap and hip hop culture on whites. I am interested in how whites perceive themselves and how they are perceived as

they practice rap in London's multicultural setting.

The conclusion summarizes the findings of the study and evaluates them in relation to the discussion of race, class, and rap. I explore the implications of these findings for studies of rap and hip hop and for the production of popular culture in Britain and the black diaspora. In addition, I discuss the practice of black popular culture in relation to multiculturalism and hybridity.

Directions

Rap in London is alive, but leads a unique existence. What began as a cultural form primarily associated with working class black youth and segments of the white community has spread to include an increasing number of people from various nationalities, racial, and class backgrounds. This mirrors what has happened on a global scale, but the events in the UK are unique and are worthy of examination in relation to the development of culture in multicultural places. The discussion of these issues as they relate to race and class dynamics give an additional reading of how popular culture develops in multicultural settings. During the course of my research, hip hop was

seen as an inclusive culture, but at the same time, blacks felt a sense that it was created out of their unique racial and class experience. They also felt that it was derived from some similar social and historical similarities between diasporic populations. Can it can be assumed that in cosmopolitan places like London there is an eventual progression to the hybridization and creation of culture and identities whereby cultural and racial mixture is seen as a solution to racism and inequality? My work asks whether this is a solution, whether a solution indeed exists, and whether the citizens of these societies want a solution. Rap music and hip hop culture serve as excellent sites to understand the activities and dialogue that are involved in the nature of cultural development in these multicultural environs.

CHAPTER ONE
RESEARCH BACKGROUND and METHODS

Introduction

Chapter one provides an overview of some of the topical issues that are addressed in the dissertation. It also gives a context in which to view the research findings. In addition, I discuss the research methods that are utilized in the project. The study examines the ways in which issues of race and class impact the development and practice of rap. The research focuses on the observation and evaluation of the practices of rap artists in their local surroundings, in order to gain a wider understanding of the social context in which rap develops. The aim is to understand the link between the everyday lived experiences of rappers, what they rap about and how they interact in the context of hip hop culture. As stated in the introduction, I consider the intersection of the musical and the social aspects of rap music.

I focused my research primarily on the non-mainstream or underground version of rap music. The term "underground"

is used in popular discussions of rap to refer to rappers who have not gained wide exposure or are not involved in the commercially viable elements of the music industry. I appropriated this term from discussions with my informants because it explains the way that they were involved in rap.

Before continuing I should note that I find the term "underground" somewhat problematic¹. I do not suggest that underground is a "purer" form of rap than commercial rap. There are few rappers who do not want to make money from rapping. However, the rappers who were my informants were adamant about maintaining a particular musical standard, even if this was not palatable to a commercial or mass audience. These artists wanted to make money as rappers. However, they ran into problems that were related to the lack of commercial viability of underground rap music in London. Rather than re-formulate their music to gain acceptance by a mass audience, the rappers were concerned with the integrity of the music's message. In a wider context, I feel that the term "underground" is over-used to describe rap and is beginning to negate critical dialogue, as mainstream and underground merge and diverge at many

¹ Krims (2000) and Walser (1993) discuss the utility in examining rap music in a commercialized rather than non-commercialized setting.

points. Therefore, I use the term underground cautiously.

In this circle, some of the best known rappers in the London underground are Roots Manuva, Blak Twang, and Task Force, all of whom use a combination of British and Jamaican speech and delivery in their rhymes. A distinctive character of London rap, and urban popular culture more generally, is the presence of West Indian, primarily Jamaican, culture. This approach to creating rap is very much tied to the idea of being urban and to what is considered 'street' and non-mainstream. There is also a movement of artists that rap in a more conventional British accent and style. Both styles will be discussed throughout the dissertation.

Section I. Research Population

This section gives an overview of the main informants who were involved in the study. For organizational purposes, I grouped my informants into two types of rappers-reality and independent. Both groups exist in the underground rap community in London. What separates them is their approach to making rap music. This is seen in the content of their lyrics, style of rapping, and presentation. These are not meant to be exclusive

categories. There is a degree of overlap between the groups and in some cases the members of divergent groups spend extensive amounts of time together as they perform and socially interact in similar venues and frequent some of the same record stores. The categories are meant to demonstrate the differences and similarities between the rappers.

A. Participants

There were four informants who served as my point of entry into a wider group of rappers and with whom I discussed my research in detail. I go into greater detail about them in the later chapters. The first informant was a male of Jamaican descent in Bethnal Green in the borough of Hackney called Carlton. He is part of the rap group called 12 Stone. Carlton belongs to the category of rapper that I call the reality rappers. The second was a solo reality rapper of European descent from Finsbury Park, North London named Steven. Albert, the third rapper, was of Nigerian extraction. He is a solo rapper, dee jay and urban culture journalist who lives in the Hoxton Square area of Hackney. I placed him in a category called independent rappers. The fourth rapper was a white male of European descent,

Charles, from Canonbury in the borough of Islington. His group's name is Task Force. He also belongs to the group of rappers that I called independent rappers. Through interviews and conversations, it became clear that the reality rappers and the independent rappers had had regular exposure to each other for a period of no less than five years through their contact at monthly rap events in the early 1990s, such as Flavor of the Month at a venue called The Borderline. These events gave many of my informants opportunities to rap at open mic sessions and see rap acts perform. Attendance and participation at events like these gave rise to collective common experiences in rap. Therefore, there was a baseline from which I could work in interviewing them and asking questions about the rap community. In essence, these were the people whom I repeatedly saw at concerts, record shops, open mics, and other events and whom I considered representative of rap in London. They were also key to the research because they provided certain in-roads, knowledge and influence. This in turn made them primary candidates for interviewing and with whom to conduct participant observation.

The informants are also linked by their reliance on local technology--technology that was accessible and

relatively inexpensive--to produce their music. Because they have had little start up money, they could not afford to rent a recording studio which can run upwards of £100 [\$160] a day. In turn, recording music at home is critical because it reduces the amount of time that the rappers have to spend in a professional recording studio. After their home recording sessions they went to a professional recording studio to perfect or "master" the recording. As will be shown later, local technology such as samplers, drum machines, turntables, multi-track recorders, microphones and especially records in the form of vinyl are central to the creation of their music. Vinyl records were important to the informants because they provided many of the groups with samples² for their music. Their vinyl collections are reflective of the type of music that they like, how long they have collected records, and the lengths to which they went to acquire rare copies of records.

The rappers rely on a series of outlets to get their music heard. The primary way for underground rap records to get public exposure is through radio, particularly on the nationally broadcast Radio 1 Rap Show on BBC (British

² A sample is a brief recorded piece of a song that can be repeated to form what is called a loop. A loop can be

Broadcasting Corporation) on Friday and Saturday nights. At the time of research, one of the main local London rap shows was CHOICE FM's Friday Night Flavors, aired on Friday night. This station only served South London. It was, however, attempting to gain a city-wide license. CHOICE FM is considered a "community" station. In this case, that means that it is aimed primarily at a black audience and has a weaker broadcasting signal than larger radio stations. Another local rap show aired on KISS FM on Wednesday night. Finally, pirate radio³ stations also featured rap music shows. "Pirates", as they are called, are illegal stations that tap into an available radio frequency. Ideally, they are set up on the top of tall buildings in order to be in a position to broadcast a wider and clearer signal. Participation in pirate radio is problematic because if caught, the dee jays can have their records confiscated, and receive fines or possible jail terms. My informant Albert was involved in such a scenario. He and a partner produced a radio show from the Crystal Palace region of South London. The authorities located and

speeded up or slowed down to create a melody, bass line or background for a song.

³ Hind and Stephens (1985) note the importance of pirate radio to urban populations especially in the early days of UK rap.

arrested his partner and confiscated his records. This takes on added significance because a dee jay's record collection represents years of collecting and some records are no longer produced, difficult to find again, or are too expensive to re-acquire.

The average age of my informants was 25. They are of London's second hip hop generation. The first generation was involved in hip hop during the mid 1980s to the early 1990s. Their range of schooling varied from not finishing school, which ends when the student reaches sixteen years of age, to attending a few years of college. In a general sense, the informants lacked tangible mainstream job skills that are frequently referred to in the UK as "qualifications". Some would call them underclass, but I do not believe that this term describes them well. Working class and poor is more accurate, as underclass is a nebulous category and it also suggests a degree of fatalism that this group did not have. Further complicating the underclass moniker are the perks that some of my informants received as a result of their involvement in rap such as free clothes and travel opportunities which raised questions about what the category of working class entailed.

1. Reality Rappers

Reality rappers use their music to explicitly discuss their experiences as people living in inner city London. This group has adopted a musical aesthetic that mirrors US commercial rap, with a focus on urban street life. The following section gives a description of the reality rappers that I studied during my fieldwork.

Carlton is a reality rapper of Jamaican extraction who lives in Bethnal Green. He has a link to Jamaica through his parents and spoke Jamaican patois with relative ease. The line between east London speech and patois was easy to navigate in his eyes and he rapped in this style. At the time of my research, he and his crew called 12 Stone appeared as guests on local radio station CHOICE FM as well as the Radio 1 Rap Show. They were also attempting to independently produce and distribute a compact disc.

Carlton's particular neighborhood of Bethnal Green is somewhat desolate. Carlton lives approximately a mile from the Bethnal Green tube station. He lived in a housing estate that had approximately 50 units. An estate is a complex of government subsidized housing. This form of housing will be discussed later in the chapter. Carlton lived on the third floor with his father, Mr. Martin, a

Jamaican Muslim who was a former painter for the city. Mr. Martin took early retirement when this particular industry was privatized.

Carlton's father had outspoken ideas about race and class in the UK. Unfortunately, after the fieldwork ended he passed away. The flat [apartment] had three bedrooms with a view that overlooked a grassy courtyard on one side and a playground as well as a similar estate on the other side. The flats house approximately 200 people. For security reasons, the Martin's front door is behind an iron gate. There are approximately ten small businesses such as a fish and chips shop, a pub, and several off licenses [convenience stores] in the neighborhood. In addition, the immediate area has a small number of factories including garment sweatshops employing South East Asians. The factories border this block of flats on two sides. There are two roads that lead to these flats from the main road, both of which have minimal traffic in the day and are desolate and poorly lit at night. Although processes of gentrification are not as developed as in other areas in London, Hackney is witnessing an influx of younger upwardly mobile residents.

Besides Carlton, there are three other members in 12

Stone. Dwayne is Carlton's closest friend in the group. He lives approximately a five minute walk from Carlton's home in an adjacent estate tower block of 15 floors. Because the two homes are close, the two rappers usually work on the production of the music together. Dwayne's apartment houses some of the group's musical equipment. Emphasizing their lack of access to resources, the equipment is rudimentary by today's standards, consisting of a computer and sampling program connected to a home stereo system. Microphones and other audio devices are also linked to this stereo system. The group recorded material on this equipment and produced a demo [demonstration] tape to play on the radio in order to gain support and exposure. The quality of the recording was only adequate, but it was nonetheless aired on the radio. Until recently, the group's music was produced solely on this equipment, but they later got access to a recording facility. Carlton recently told me that the group produced and distributed a compact disc and formed their own record label.

Dwayne's flat serves as a point where others from the area come together to rap and exchange ideas. It is a very cramped space where up to seven or eight people can find themselves sandwiched into a small 15 x 20 foot room. The

main group is comprised of two additional members, but there are other people from the area who are affiliated with the group as part of a crew with whom they collaborate. The name of this wider crew is the Breakaway Republic. The two additional members of 12 Stone, Curtis and Mike, were only occasional participants during my fieldwork. Curtis supports two young children through his activities in the informal economy selling marijuana. Mike began a video production course at a local college and was often involved with this. 12 Stone will be discussed in chapter four.

Steven is a white reality rapper from Finsbury Park, North London. His main peer group consists of both working class blacks and whites. However, he spends a great deal of time with white independent rapper, Charles who will be discussed later. During the fieldwork, Steven did not have a permanent place to live and moved between several flats. For that reason, I do not go into great detail concerning his residential status. During the time I spent with him, however, he consistently lived in publicly subsidized housing in a working class and racially integrated area in North London.

Steven dropped out of school at age 12. Since his exit

from school he has made money in the informal economy, for example, through a series of credit card schemes whereby merchandise is purchased using a credit card with an incorrect billing address. He also sells stolen property and marijuana.

Like the black reality rappers, Steven's approach to making rap is explicitly tied to reflecting his experiences as a working class person. The topic of class alienation is a theme that runs through his music. His rap style moves between traditional rapping and a more reggae orientated approach to lyrical delivery. I will return to a discussion of this style at a later point in the dissertation. Unfortunately, Steven's rap career has not reached its full potential because he has been periodically jailed as a result of his illegal activities. In fact, I visited him once in jail near the end of my fieldwork. Despite these sporadic absences, he maintains a reputation as a talented rapper in the scene.

Steven identifies strongly with black culture. His daily speech is a combination of North London dialect with a measure of West Indian vocabulary and inflection. Steven revealed that he was introduced to black British culture and hip hop culture at an early age. Originally from a

predominately West Indian area in Leeds in North England, he moved to London as a young child with his mother who is a single parent. He has intimate contact with the black community. His brother is the product of an inter-racial relationship between Steven's mother and a black father. Steven has one child of his own whose mother is black.

In the rap community, he is well known for cultural amalgamation. This is reflected in Steven's choice of friends and associates who are black, Asian and white. He is a founding member of a multi-cultural hip hop collective called the M.U.D. Family [M.U.D .Fam]. M.U.D. Family's motto is "mud is thicker than water." As working class people, the members believe that, regardless of race, they are the underdogs, the poor and disadvantaged in London. In turn, they are metaphorically considered by society to be low in stature or symbolically low to the ground, as is mud or dirt. The idea that they organize and build personal links from this position is the premise behind the creation of the M.U.D. Family. Upon ending my fieldwork, a founding member who was also an informant told me that I should consider myself part of the M.U.D. Family as well. Steven refers to the ideals behind M.U.D. Family frequently in speech and on records. I discuss Steven in greater detail

in chapter five.

2. Independent Rappers

Independent rappers see the aesthetic and visual representation of rap as more fluid and less fixed on the imagery of the US. In contrast to the reality rappers, independent rappers use rap as more of a cultural resource and rap about a range of topics other than their everyday experiences.

Albert who was mentioned earlier is a rapper, dee jay, and journalist of Nigerian extraction who provided me with an overview of race and class from the perspective of a young black person. He served as a point of entry into a large group of working class blacks and a few whites that were involved in rap and hip hop in a wider sense. Albert was an invaluable source of information as he invited me to rap related gatherings in and outside his home, and informed me of journalistic opportunities and rap performances. Albert and I saw each other often, communicated regularly, and attended functions together.

Albert grew up in Hackney, North London and has lived in his current flat for several years. The main room holds about 1000 records with various album covers posted on the

ledge above the sliding kitchen door as decoration. A pair of three foot high speakers, stereo receiver, amplifier, tape deck and sampler dominate the room. This room is where the activity around rap takes place. Albert raps with friends he has known since his teens, but as an artist he collaborates with other artists or performs as a solo rapper. His friends are constantly at the flat, most of them coming from estates in the area. They are not as financially "successful" as Albert in that they do not have steady income or are looking for work. He raps with his friends mainly for practice and recreation and to maintain his lyrical skills.

Albert lives in an area that has undergone extreme economic change. His estate is in the rapidly changing area of Hoxton Square. Once known as one of the poorest sections of London, the Old Street area is now home to an increasing number of restaurants, recording studios, media-based businesses as well as a movie theater that shows art house movies and a series of small trendy boutiques and clubs. In addition, a University of Westminster dormitory was recently built close by.

The estate on which Albert lives houses three four story single and multi-occupant flats. The estate houses

approximately 300 people and like other estates it is racially mixed. He lives in a one bedroom flat on the ground floor. The economic resurgence of the area lies in contrast to the many estates close to his flat that according to Albert, are plagued by a heroin and crack epidemic.

Albert makes money from dee jaying several times a week, performing, hosting hip hop events, touring with other rappers, and freelance writing for music and urban lifestyle magazines. He is also involved and participates in the black arts scene in London. This includes poetry readings and art openings, which subsequently gave him an awareness and access to arts-based funding. Unlike the others rappers in the study, Albert does not participate in the underground economy for financial support. He has a higher level of education than the other rappers and attended Thames Valley University for two years, but did not finish his media studies degree.

Charles is a 25 year old white independent rapper who is actively involved as part of a wider multiracial collective of rappers that includes people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds referred to earlier as the M.U.D. Family. He is one of the key informants in this

group. Like other independent rappers, he has knowledge of the underground hip hop scene in London and the US. Charles and his brother Fred rap on a regular basis in performances in London and throughout the UK as part of a rap group called Task Force.

Like Steven, who was mentioned earlier, Charles is known within the rap community as a person who exhibits behaviors and characteristics that associate him with black people. The way that Charles raps reflects his exposure to and emulation of black culture. He and his white friends are considered to be white people who act "black". He wears his hair in a style that is considered black and speaks with a mix of cockney and Jamaican slang that effectively gives him the speech patterns of a black youth. Charles and his multi-racial peer group regularly use words that are associated with inner city, especially black, youth such as "blood" [friend] and "bredrin" [close friend/brother]. It was standard for this informant to speak Jamaican patois, but adjust his speech around blacks whom he did not know. On record, he rapped in North London slang along with Jamaican slang. He dresses as other inner city young people dress: straight legged jeans, athletic shoes, and a t-shirt. Charles is well known as one of the most talented

freestylers⁴ in the rap community, a reputation that has gained him a degree of respect.

Similar to the reality rappers in this study, Charles lacks educational qualifications. He did not finish secondary school. He told me that the only job he has held was for a few weeks at a Calvin Klein factory. His main source of income is by performing at rap shows and selling marijuana. His rap group has a following within their North London area and across the country. They have appeared on Friday Night Flavors on CHOICE FM as well on the Radio 1 Rap Show. In addition, this group went on a UK tour and played at the Glastonbury Musical Festival, which is one of Britain's largest annual music events.

The estate on which Charles lives combines a three story block of flats with low rise one and two story house-style buildings that are home to approximately 300 residents. To mark the contrast in the area, directly across the street from my informant's estate are homes worth £250,000 [approximately \$410,000]. Within half a mile there are other affluent areas accessed by private streets. These are "exclusive" areas with streets that prohibit unauthorized and non-residential traffic. The informants

⁴ Freestyling is the act of creating spontaneous raps at any

recall being stopped and questioned by police after taking short cuts through the areas, where they were not supposed to walk. In addition, the informants remark that in the past, cars have been set up as "dummies" with valuables in clear view within the car in order to lure potential thieves into theft.

The informants' flats and other flats in the study serve as focal points of rap activity on the estates and in the neighborhood. Here, people from the area come together and a range of rap and non-rap related activities occur. There is recording equipment in the main room that allows the informants to record their music. Charles' flat includes, for example, a four track recorder, Akai MPC 2000 sampler, turntable, amplifier, receiver, an enclosed microphone recording area, and a collection of approximately 800 records on vinyl. Almost daily, members of the crew and acquaintances congregate to hear and produce music or simply converse. Essentially, this room is where arguments, debate and general discussions concerning rap and other subjects take place. There is room to seat the four to five people who usually show up during the day. The evening is more crowded with upwards of six or more

given moment.

people occupying the space.

In addition to the M.U.D. Family, Charles was linked to another organization involved in rap in his area. Almost like a web, the connection to a larger rap collective was also the case with other rappers in the study. In Charles' case, the name of the larger group is the Bury Crew. This name is taken from the suffix "Bury" which is derived from the surrounding area of Highbury/Islington. The informants repeatedly celebrate, or "big up", where they live by bringing the name and activities of their area into their lyrics and everyday conversations. The idea of belonging to a particular area is extremely important to them and others in the study. As is the case within rap communities globally, ideas of place, space and neighborhood are explicitly linked and are used to represent and identify group members. The Bury Crew is a collective of approximately 30 people who live in the area and have been involved in hip hop for more than 10 years. At the time of study, not all of the people in the crew were rappers, some were graffiti artists while others were dee jays. The Bury Crew began as a kind of social group and then was transformed into a hip hop collective as the members became increasingly involved in making rap music and doing

graffiti and other hip hop activity.

Section II. The Research Context

I conducted research in several types of spaces that included the homes of my informants as well as the venues at which they performed and frequented. In order to gain the widest perspective possible, I observed the practice of rap in the homes and neighborhoods of my informants as well as attending rap competitions, rap related debates, and the taping of rap documentaries. The members of the community were my informants and they provided me with much of the ethnographic material that I used.

A. The Estates

Much of this study takes place on the estates in the homes of the informants. A housing estate is a group of centrally located buildings that are subsidized by the local government. They vary in size and location in the city. This is an important space where the cultural interaction of my informants takes place. Estates offer affordable housing for poor peoples with an average council rent at about £60 [\$100] a month. To gain a wider perspective on housing, in 1999 the average home cost in

London was £155,000 [\$260,000]. The average rent for a two bedroom property in 1998 was £235 [\$390]. Overall, as many as one quarter of the households in council housing earn incomes of less than £125 [\$210] per week (London Housing Unit - London Housing Fact File 2000).

One of the most noticeable aspects of the estates, and of London more generally, is the residential closeness of people from various racial and cultural backgrounds. Here, large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds with limited economic and political resources live within close proximity to each other. The class uniformity and racial variation give rise to interesting personal and cultural relationships on the estates. Here, large groups of working class people from different racial and cultural backgrounds are placed together and expected to co-exist. By bringing together various groups the estate played an important role in the development of rap and other urban cultural forms. Such settings were ideal places in which to conduct research on rap and the multicultural conditions under which it is produced.

Because of the high numbers of working class residents, these inner city environments encourage friendships and alliances that do not always correspond to

the general society's norms concerning race. Echoed throughout the discussions with my informants who lived on these estates was the fact that they grew up with and knew people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. As will be seen in the dissertation, this dynamic produced key cultural interactions that speak to the fluid nature of race and culture in the inner city.

In inner city environments, Jamaican and wider black cultural influences dictate much of the cultural practices of working class youth or what is called 'street culture'. The term street culture has become synonymous with the term 'black' culture throughout the city. The Jamaican influence on street culture is seen as hegemonic by some of my black African informants who resist this influence or at least do not incorporate it into their daily routine as much as others. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

The large size of the buildings give the estates an almost contained feeling. Given the high density of people with little access to resources, these people--black, white, South Asian and others--seem forgotten, confined to undertake cultural as well as economic activities in this space. Broken bottles, dog urine and feces, inartistic

poorly done graffiti, dark stairwells, broken or missing security gates and drug activity characterize some of the buildings where I spent time. The buildings in which I did research included a large tower block and low-rise three story structure basically square in design. The physical monotony of the structures and the coldness of the hallways add to the isolated feeling. The estate does not always appear fully integrated into the flow of the surrounding area. For example, although Albert's flat is in the trendy area of Hoxton Square, an area that has undergone some economic regeneration, his estate did not show the signs of positive economic activity. The psychological and economic barriers erected between the residents and the city can at times seem quite large and getting off the estate, or out of the estate housing scheme into private ownership, is difficult for some.

To gain perspective we need only consider that transportation and housing are among some of the most costly expenses in London. A one-day travel pass covering two central zones of the city is almost £5 [\$8]. Other miscellaneous expenses are quite costly. For example, a single 12 inch record can cost £6 [\$10], a cd can cost up to £14 [\$23], a meal at a cafe £4 [\$7], and admission to a

club £10 [\$16].

Many of my informants collected an unemployment benefit known as the dole. It is a bi-weekly payment given by the government in lieu of finding a job. The act of collecting dole is called "signing on". When the check is picked up, the recipients are supposed to report any work they have obtained or report jobs that have been sought since the last payment period. At roughly £70 [\$115] every two weeks, another source of income was absolutely necessary. Some "juggled" which meant that they sold "draw" [marijuana] or did other things to make money. Here, I specifically do not want to make any connection between rap music and drugs. Selling marijuana was what some people did and I do not suggest that all of my informants sold or consumed drugs. If anything, the selling of marijuana is a city wide activity that is not related to rap and hip hop but to the tenuous economic position and poor job prospects for working class people.

B. Neighborhoods

The black reality rappers and black independent rappers whom I studied live in the northeast London borough of Hackney, home to more than 200,000 residents. In

comparison to the rest of London, it has a relatively higher number of people of black Caribbean (11 percent) and black African descent (7 percent) than the rest of London. It also has one of the worst reputations for livability in the city. This is in part because of its high unemployment rate (22 percent for males and 12 percent for females) and poor schools. The crime rate also adds to the area's notorious reputation as the rate for criminal damage is almost 50 percent higher than the city average and the rate for violence against people is almost 75 percent higher than the city average (Hackney Crime and Disorder Audit 1998/99). Hackney is seen as a rough part of London. The reality rappers say that often people react negatively upon finding out that they are from Hackney. Carlton told me that when he went on a local radio show the staff acted coldly to him when he revealed that he was from Hackney. The staff felt that being from Hackney meant that he was rough, wild and poor.

The white independents live in Islington, a section of North London which is the 10th most deprived area in England (London Housing News 2000). Even so, an established affluent population as well as a number of young professionals, reside here. Much like other parts of

London, such as Brixton in South London for example, the area has undergone processes of gentrification in the past 5-10 years. In fact the Islington area was one of the first areas in London to undergo gentrification. My informants reflect on this, explaining it less in terms of gentrification than as change that has not encompassed them.

C. Venues

The informants in this study performed at and/or frequented the venues listed in this section. In addition, these venues were useful places to view the practice of rap in a public setting as well as the interactions between the members of the rap community. Mudlumz is the name of a monthly event that is organized by Steven, Charles and the M.U.D. Family. It is a rap showcase featuring local artists. This event provides a platform for local London artists who have released music as well as those who are just beginning their rap careers. It consists of performances, open mics and the playing of rap music. The event was held in North London at a venue called Dingwalls in Camden Lock. Dingwalls holds approximately 600 people.

The Hop, another monthly event, was put on by local

club promoters and has run for several years. It takes place at a club called The End in central London. The crowd in this venue is more racially and class heterogeneous than Mudlumz. Because it is in London's trendy West End, the club attracts and accepts a more diverse, less black and less working class crowd. The club has in-house dee jays who play regularly and guest dee jays and mcs who rotate weekly. The black crowd comes to the club when the black dee jay plays and when this is the case, the contrast is fairly noticeable. People who have been involved in rap for a significant period, called "heads", and those who are newer to rap or see it as a fad, known as "trendies", come together in this space. The music that is played here is much the same as that at Mudlumz. There are no live performances, but the mc of the night sometimes does short raps, although usually his main job is to motivate the crowd to move. The club holds approximately 200 people.

Scratch is London's best known rap night. It takes place every first Thursday of the month. At the time of research it took place at La Scala, a large venue in King's Cross, North London. La Scala can hold over 1500 people. Scratch attracts a young white middle class crowd. The night features live performances by UK and US rap artists.

Section III. Research Design

In the course of my fieldwork I attempted to evaluate different facets of rap by integrating myself into the community and by conducting participant observation, attending events - UK and US hip hop performance, recreational events; in-home and studio recordings, video-taping events, listening to weekly hip hop radio shows, interviewing US and UK artists, and writing for US and UK hip hop publications. These activities, as well as on-going discussions, colored my perspective concerning the development of rap in London. The following is a description of my research methods.

A. Interviews

Along with my intense involvement described above, I conducted interviews with informants involved in the present and earlier eras of rap. I located interviewees through a snow ball method by personally approaching people and through referrals. After each interview the interviewee usually gave me names of others with whom I should speak. In most cases, I continued to come in contact with my interviewees at various points after the interviews, enabling me to informally discuss issues that arose during

the interviews or other more general issues related to rap. The interviews were also a useful means by which to integrate myself within the community.

I conducted interviews with approximately ten people who were involved in rap during its onset in the mid 1980s. I call these people generation one. These interviews attempted to gain a historical perspective concerning the development of rap in London and the social conditions that were in place when rap first arrived. I wanted to establish a point of reference from which to examine the initial involvement of racial and class groups. I was also interested in discovering the social events that might have influenced the development of rap during this time.

Throughout the research period I conducted on-going interviews with persons currently involved with rap. I refer to these people as generation two. These interviews centered on trying to gain the perspective of the interviewee concerning changes in the rap community as well their perception of issues of race and class in relation to rap. I wanted to have the informants rather than the researcher speak about and for rap. My goal was to facilitate discussion.

B. Participant Observation

The participant observation aspect of the study was located in the neighborhoods of the informants. This was the most efficient and productive approach to gather information since I wanted to understand how rap is practiced in local surroundings. This aspect of the research consisted of spending time with informants in their homes and attending performances, social events and recording sessions with them. My aim was to gain a diverse understanding of the social context in which rap is created. This research revealed much about the daily life of working class persons involved in rap. This illustrated many of the links between the everyday life experiences of the informants and their musical output.

C. Library Research

I conducted six weeks of bibliographic research in The British Library that was directed at examining what has been written in popular UK journals concerning rap. Here, I engaged in textual analyses of popular music journals, *Blues and Soul*, *Hip Hop Connection*, *Melody Maker*, *Sounds*, *New Music Express* and *Black Echoes (Echoes)*. All are from the UK and date from 1985 to 1999. In addition, I examined documentaries that dealt with the creation of rap in London

during the initial period as well as footage of UK rap performances during the same period.

D. Performances

In order to view the live performance of rap in London I attended approximately 40 concerts. These involved both UK and US artists. There were also performances that involved freestyle sessions such as at several documentary tapings and at open mic sessions.

E. Journalistic Writing

In order to gain an additional perspective on the perception of rap in London, I became employed as a free lance writer at a London-based music publication. I contributed a series of interviews that I conducted with US artists while in London. This aspect of the research was useful because it put me in contact with writers and additional artists whose perspectives I incorporated into my analysis of rap in London. This was a useful supplement to the work done with my research population. In this instance, I was able to discuss issues that arose during my work with the staff of the publication and others who had different perspectives concerning rap in London.

F. Video

I videotaped performances in the latter stages of my project. This involved taping group performances for ethnographic and referential purposes. I used a 8mm camera with Hi-8 film. I taped approximately 10 performances by local rap artists.

CHAPTER TWO

MOVEMENT and TRANSLATION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the development and movement of rap within a larger global framework. I use the term "flow" to describe the way in which rap moves between people and places and the simultaneous shifts of lyrics, ideas and people that accompany the movement of rap. I discuss the relationship between rap in different places as I locate some of the specific ways that rap is practiced and some of the outcomes of this. The aim is to place rap in a context that acknowledges its material and creative aspects in both domestic and global contexts. The research is concerned with what happens to rap when it is placed and practiced in a global context and what this can tell researchers about the flow, the direction of culture, and personal connections that are born out of the wider hip hop movement.

Situating the Debate

The strength of rap music is its malleability to group, place and space. This lends itself to dynamism and makes it challenging to halt and study. Rap music represents a deluge of images, ideas, and practices that have come to represent a culture. This study attempts to provide a brief examination of one variant: rap in London.

Back (1996) provides an interesting perspective concerning the development of rap in London. According to him, London rap is an adaptation of the American form of rap to the experiences of black Britons. Based on research in South London, Back states that rap in London

Looks out and plots cultural connections with African Americans, while at the same time looking in and reconstituting the local aesthetics of South London. The language and style of South London are thus laced with symbols and cultural fragments from urban America and the Caribbean that are rearranged in a unique way (Back 1996:209).

Implicit in this view of rap in London are ideas about racial and class identity. Through his discussion of lyricism in London rap, Back demonstrates how blacks in London appropriate rap to reflect their own surroundings and experiences. As he states, rap in London is "the language of New York being used to document and mythologize the happenings in South London" (Back 1996:209). Back puts rap in London into a wider frame that acknowledges a link

between people of African descent who are involved in rap. For him, the way that blacks in London localize rap is tied to an analogous historical and cultural connection.

In a recent study, Bennet (1998) examines rap in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne in the north of England as an appropriation of a black cultural form among working class white youth. The people in Bennet's study are white rappers and fans who do not come into regular contact with blacks. Here, notions of blackness that have come to be associated with rap music and hip hop culture are made secondary to the actual practicing of rap. Here, the rap music that is created by whites is disassociated from notions of racial or nationalistic identity. Rather, the whites see themselves as creating "Geordie"¹ rap. Bennet focuses on the way that this group makes the connection between their local circumstances and the global presence of rap by creating and localizing their Geordie rap. This is accomplished by making the content and practice of their music revolve around locality and local experience.

The idea of the appropriation of rap in divergent places brings up issues concerning authenticity. Paul Gilroy (1993) analyzes the diasporic aspects of popular

culture as he re-examines the idea of authenticity based on ethnic criteria. Gilroy does not wholly dismiss the possibility of the creation of links between various peoples of African descent and others through participation in on-going cultural practices. However, he suggests that such links call into question authenticity due to the fact that "music cannot be reduced to a fixed dialogue between a thinking racial self and a stable racial community" (Gilroy 1994:115). Gilroy's perspective problematizes the issue of using criteria that are deemed natural to define the relationship between particular cultural practices and race. In a related sense, his critique also calls into question the types of relationships that come about through contact between people of African and European descent in both a historical and contemporary context (Gilroy 1993). He addresses links between racialized groups through popular culture. Gilroy uses the idea of hybrid cultures to explain how racial groups do not exclusively create cultural practices, but are instead the products of contact and syncretism between these groups. In many ways, this perspective is used to de-center the practice of rap in its initial stages in the US and the black community. This is

¹ Geordie is a term that refers to a person from Tyneside in

meant to confound authenticity based on racial or national criteria.

The work of Bennet, Back, and in a related sense, Gilroy touches upon important issues in the relation of rap to race and class. In London, because of the multiracial characteristics of the local level neighborhood and wider city, the relationship of race and class cannot be ignored. The question is not whether blacks and whites interact in the realm of rap, but rather how and under what conditions this interaction occurs. In other words, what are the terms of cultural interaction and how has this changed in the UK in the context of the development of popular culture and the growth of youth culture in the late twentieth century?

Rap Music in Comparative Perspective

The perspectives in and discussions of rap are as divergent as the examples of the practice of rap. The literature varies in scope and location as well as theoretical and academic approach. I include works that deal with the UK and the US, examining debates that surround rap and hip hop in order to evaluate the similarities and differences. This manner of examination

North of England.

establishes a wider discourse concerning hip hop as it highlights some of the factors that affect the practice of rap.

Tricia Rose (1994a) looks at the development of rap music and hip hop culture in relation to wider social conditions in New York City in the 1970s through 1990s, bringing in aesthetics, technology, orality and gender - among other variables. According to Rose, factors such as economic blight, the building of the Cross Bronx Expressway, the financial mismanagement of New York City during the 1970s, and the city's racial and ethnic diversity all combined with a cultural synthesis to produce hip hop culture.

Rose contextualizes the birth and growth of rap music and hip hop in a way similar to Toop's (1984b) and Hager's (1984) earlier documentations of hip hop's development. In her analysis of rap music she stresses the importance of situating rap in a wider setting, stating that

Rap music brings together a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural, and political issues. Rap's contradictory articulations are not signs of absent intellectual clarity; they are a common feature of community and popular cultural, social and political viewpoint. These unusually abundant polyvocal conversations seem irrational when they are severed from the social contexts where everyday struggles over resources, pleasure, and meanings take place (Rose 1994a:2).

Foreman (2000) discusses the way in which race is linked to rap's development and practice as he examines the relation between rappers' local surroundings and their music. Watkins (1998), Tate (1992) and Dyson (1996) treat rap as blacks' most recent appropriation of past black cultural expression, authenticity, representation, and self depiction. Dyson remarks,

As rap extends its vision and influence, its unfavorable origin and its relentless quest to represent youth are both a consolation and challenge to hip hoppers. They remind rappers that history is not merely the stuff of imperial dreams from above. Representing history is within the reach of those who seek to seize the opportunity to speak for themselves, to represent their interests at all costs (Dyson 1996:178).

In this case, rap is seen as a resource as well as an expressive tool that is used by African American youth in order to negotiate a marginalized position in US society. But Flores (2000) challenges the notion of hip hop's development as a solely black American cultural form. He draws attention to the practice and influence of New York Latinos especially in hip hop's early days of dance and more recently in rap.

Lipsitz (1994) builds on the diasporic practices of rap as briefly discussed by Rose (1994a). He looks at rap

as part of a larger diasporic dialogue between dispersed populations. Moving between black musical genre and continent, the author states that

The diasporic conversation within hip hop and other black music forms provides a powerful illustration of the potential for contemporary commercialized leisure to carry images, ideas, and icons of enormous political importance between cultures (Lipsitz 1994:27).

Here, Lipsitz sees popular culture as

A privileged site of transnational communication, organization, and mobilization at a time when the parochialism of trade unions and political parties leaves those institutions locked into national identities that seem to render them powerless to confront inequities and injustices of the new global economy (Lipsitz 1994:34).

In a reading of resistance similar to that used by Kelley (1994) in regards to rap in Los Angeles, Lipsitz sees wider political implications in the practice of popular culture. He discusses the potential of popular culture, and rap music more specifically, as a unifying social movement.

The literature on rap music and hip hop culture falls between viewing it as primarily an African American rooted cultural practice and as a multi-cultural and multi-vocal form that is too divergent to be tied to a particular country or group. The latter school of thought critiques ideas that hip hop is made primarily for and by African American youth. Issues of race, class and nationality are

implicit, but not specifically drawn out and examined in relation to each other.

The literature reveals little concerning relations between racial and class groups. In the US, the perception of popular culture emphasizes race, ignoring the influence of class on the development of hip hop. In contrast to the US, in the study of youth based culture, the UK's historically rigid class structure dominates discussions of popular culture. Here, the racial component in the study of popular culture requires more attention. This does not mean that race should obscure issues of class in the examination of popular culture. However, the obverse should not occur. The power dimensions of cultural "exchanges" need to be considered in order to develop a nuanced understanding of the intersection of race and class within rap, in both the UK and US.

Throughout my research it became apparent that people of African descent had specific ways in which they culturally defined themselves in relation to other groups. The question becomes one of understanding how this occurs without relying on biological explanations of cultural development and creation that conflate culture with natural ability. Instead, researchers must give consideration to

the specific ways in which these groups are historically inserted into various societies. This point will be further addressed later in the chapter. The global spread of rap music and hip hop culture extends the discussion and debate to divergent places. As we will see, rap's relation to race and class is altered as divergent groups continue to appropriate and re-define it.

The Movement of Rap

This section deals with some of the ways that the spread of rap can be explained from a theoretical viewpoint. I focus on ideas that relate to the movement of rap in a wider framework and the processes of commodification. I am interested in how rap moves and what forms it takes when it does so.

The spread of rap is reflective of changes in late capitalism such as the decompression of time and space and increase in globalized media (Harvey 1989; Lash and Urry 1987). In this view, the place where rap originated is no longer as salient as it once was. In a related sense, Gupta and Ferguson (1992) have been critical of the link between cultural practice and space asking "how to deal with cultural difference while abandoning ideas of (localized)

culture" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:1). While I do not see the practice of rap as tied to any one locality, for many in this study its place of origin, where it is practiced and by whom, have symbolic importance. As my research will show, the local is critical in defining how one raps as well as what one raps about. The flow of rap exists in a scenario where ideas, images, and people who are associated with rap move around with greater ease between place and space than in the past. The relation between rap communities, mainstream and underground, must be re-considered. As Raymond Williams put it in discussing the material basis for cultural movement in the 1970s,

In advanced capitalism, because of changes in the social character of labour, in the social character of communications, and in the social character of decision making, the dominant culture reaches much further than ever before in capitalist society into hitherto 'reserved' or 'resigned' areas of experience and practice and meaning. The area of effective penetration of the dominant order into the whole social and cultural process is thus now significantly greater (Williams 1977:125-126).

It is the need to exploit new products, in this case popular culture in general and hip hop culture specifically that makes the spread of this culture pervasive. This is key in the process of globalization as the idea of difference is central to the marketing and selling of products (Hall 1997). Here, hip hop youth, especially black

American, become the modern urban exotic as rap's association with race, class and "reality" is sold and bought. Lury (1996) addresses issues that are related to the global marketing of racially based products. Seeing these images as tied to major legacies of discrimination she states,

The history of consumer culture is intimately bound up with the processes of imperialism, colonialism, and the creation of hierarchical categories of race, though these categories - variously expressed in understandings of self and other, whiteness and blackness, the civilized and primitive - have themselves been transformed in the practices of consumer culture (Lury 1996:156).

The way that the reality rappers in this study choose to represent their experiences with disenfranchisement and crime are examples of this. Both blacks and whites on the private and corporate level exploit this view of black popular culture. In this dynamic, the precarious position in which working class groups find themselves is seen as they re-define and have re-defined for them what rap and hip hop entail. Here, I contemplate whether working class youth create rap music and hip hop culture or is this being sold back to them as prefabricated hip hop culture? Or are both processes in place at the same time, mutually informing each other?

Rap as Cultural Caché

In relation to class, the practice of rap also represents a type of caché. Bourdieu (1984) discusses the way in which cultural practices involving taste are related to class positions, proposing that, "taste classifies and it classifies the classifier" (Bourdieu 1984:7). In this formulation, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital refers to a type of caché that is gained from participation in particular types of cultural activities associated with higher education and prestige. This is a top down formulation that relies on a distinction between such categories as high and low culture and popular versus non popular.

I view the practice of rap as an additional type of distinction or caché that emanates from the "bottom" up rather than the "top" down. In the context of rap, markers of the working class are coveted over those of the upper class. Here, the markers of race and class become conflated. In turn, blackness becomes a mode through which rap is experienced. Those who have knowledge of and were involved in rap as it was traditionally created and in many ways practiced by working class groups gain this cultural caché. Yet, one need not necessarily be a member of the

working class to be able to claim such credentials. Often, issues of authenticity depend on the ability to reflect working class urban experiences and communicate them through language. Income and socio-economic status do not necessarily dictate "taste" in this arena, or participation in the culture.

The cultural caché of rap is not class-bound; that in turn blurs the distinction between low versus high culture. In my research, both middle class and working class groups participated in rap. However, issues of authenticity were framed in the context of a particular aesthetic and perspective that takes its musical and aesthetic cues from the urban and working class. In such a scenario, young blacks, primarily males, are the arbiters of the culture. However, this group does not necessarily control the distribution and representations of the images. Thornton's (1995) formulation of subcultural capital insightfully adds the role of the media in creating and maintaining the taste and tenure of much of youth culture. I do not down play the role of the media, but see it as interacting with the behavior and choice of people who are involved in a culture. Therefore, while the media plays an important role in the dissemination of rap music, one should be cautious

in analyzing the role of the media when examining rap music in places that do not have large rap media and hip hop industries.

An important issue is why this caché is of importance to working and urban populations in the UK. In my estimation there is a lack of political and economic power that is available to working class youth. Therefore, cultural caché is a commodity of symbolic importance that these groups gain and in turn able to exert a sense of power and influence in the realm of popular culture. This gives them a degree of financial and cultural agency that they would not otherwise have. Robin Kelley (1997) illustrates this in his discussion of how "increasingly young people have tried to turn play into an alternative to unfulfilling labor" (Kelley 1997:53). The importance of rap and hip hop to urban youth can be seen by examining the entrepreneurial opportunities that are afforded youth who utilize lyrical skill and low budget technology to make a living. With declining opportunities to resources as a result of de-industrialization, coupled with a lack of programs that address the needs of urban youth, leisure activities, in this case rap and other hip hop related

activities, are ways for this group to make money. Angela McRobbie echoes Kelly's observation as she states,

The turn to music as career rather than consumer choices (no matter how shaky these careers might be) represents a strong preference for the cultural sphere. My suggestion is that this involvement can be an empowering experience, particularly for young people with no access to the skills and qualifications acquired as a matter of course by those young people destined for university professions. Subcultures are often ways of creating job opportunities (McRobbie 1993:412).

In a similar vein, the participants in my study saw rap as a means to make money, albeit in a less lucrative manner than in the US. Here, rap is an option for the creation of income due to a lack of formal education and job skills that are marketable in the conventional economy. In London, rap and popular culture more generally are a source of potential income that is available. There are attempts to create a more lucrative and coherent infrastructure for rappers through the establishment of independent record labels owned by small companies or rappers themselves.

The Commodity and Rap

Gilroy (2000) advocates an alternative position to what he feels are narrow ideas of what "black" entails as a racial category. He suggests that these definitions of

blackness are basically marketed to blacks by blacks and others through mediums like print, film and music, especially rap music. Here, the engine behind the dissemination of these images is corporate multiculturalism. In some ways, Gilroy sees the growth of corporate multiculturalism on the part of black culture brokers as strengthening the narrow, inaccurate portrayal of blacks as racial commodities that are most commonly seen in the areas of sports and entertainment. In various sectors, race is played upon to conjure up images of the superior black athlete or the misogynistic rapper whose selfish ambitions allow them to shirk social responsibility and "go for self." The result of this lack of responsibility is that rappers and other blacks in the public eye are out for themselves and have turned their backs on a potential political agenda that well known performers in the past, such as Bob Marley and the Wailers, advocated. Gilroy states,

Now that iconization supplies the dominant communication logic, sound is giving up its primary place in favor of visual communication, and dance is in danger of becoming an overly purposive subdivision of the fitness industry, we must tread even more carefully (Gilroy 2000:342).

According to Gilroy, this represents a lost moment for blacks that are enthralled by the visual images of

misogyny, hyper-sexuality, and violence in rap and black popular culture more generally. Both blacks and whites are part of the problem as both groups use the media to disseminate images of black superiority and verbal ability that are tied to ideas of biology and nature. In his opinion, it is politically and socially debilitating to believe, as well as act on, these ideas. As these images of blackness become institutionalized the end result, or at least the process, can be described as a fascist exercise whereby race and culture become a spectacle that maintains a hegemonic image of blackness. This relationship is normalized and disseminated as it becomes marketed to blacks as well as whites among others. This course of events prevents a post-racial awareness, identity and unity.

Gilroy's argument is intriguing to say the least. In the context of debates around processes of racialization he offers a unique perspective on ways in which African American popular culture was received in Europe in the early 20th century. He also provides an interesting analysis of the institutionalization of racial categories through corporate multiculturalism. In a rather bold move, Gilroy's critique of racialization compels readers to move

beyond racial categories and the histories that these categories created, leaving behind the idea of race in favor of a more humanistic set of relations between groups. This humanistic view is termed "planetary humanism" and requires those involved in racial debate—black, white, Asian among others—to seek out other ways than race to relate to each other. Essentially, racial thought has prevented people from engaging in a coherent political project. Interestingly, one of the ways in which this project will be achieved is to do away with fascist icons and images that are associated with forms of popular culture that rap celebrates through the fetishization of the black body seen in the connection between race, culture and biology. In his opinion, rap has been reduced to its most marketable points.

Adorno (1982) discusses the pitfalls involved in the process of transforming art into commodities. In his analysis, negative aspects are produced in the marketing of music as it commodified. When this occurs, music loses its artistic worth and purpose. Adorno states,

All contemporary musical life is dominated by the commodity form; the late pre-capitalist residues have been eliminated. Music with all the attributes of the ethereal and sublime which are generously accorded it, serves as an advertisement for commodities which one

must acquire in order to be able to hear the music (Adorno 1982:278).

Corporate multiculturalism is not the only way in which a marketable form of blackness becomes attached to images of black people. Is corporate multiculturalism reflective of or driven by urban street culture? Do blacks have any way to counter these images? It seems that there are several processes occurring at the same time. To begin with, there are populations, such as my informants in this study, that attempt to filter out hegemonic images of blackness, especially associated with rap, as they critique some of the US rap that they encounter. This is the case in the US also. In the UK, some sections of the hip hop community do not accept hegemonic images of rappers and hip hop culture, whereas other segments revel in this. The point is that a dialogue and critique exist concerning the representation and production of rap and urban culture of which hip hop is a part.

This study views rap as straddling the contradiction between an expressive and consumer culture. In some cases, rap is seen as a cultural practice that is commodified to the point that it cannot any longer be used as a tool for expression and/or critique by marginalized groups. It is suggested that because rap is used by people who are

outside of the hip hop community for marketing purposes that it is a cultural form that has been completely co-opted by mainstream society with little artistic worth.

This is clear in the way in which the elements of dissent that once characterized rap have been commodified. However, it should be remembered that rap has never been without a commercial impetus since its entry into global prominence. It is clear that the desire to make money has historically been a recurrent theme in rap and hip hop culture. For example, early on in 1988 London rappers London Posse talked about the problems involved in the pursuit of money in *Money Mad*. Throughout rap's history an enthusiastic transnational record industry has developed acts and exploited trends. To discuss this process, I draw on Raymond Williams' understanding of alternative and oppositional working class cultures (Williams 1977). Williams makes a distinction between alternative and oppositional cultural practices as he states

There is a simple theoretical distinction between alternative and oppositional, that is to say between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light (Williams 1980:42).

Williams makes the break between these two by associating alternative actions with small groups and

oppositional actions with large scale mobilizations. In both cases, the idea of direct conscious action or lack thereof is stressed. Williams goes on to suggest that the line between the two is somewhat blurred as "a meaning or practice may be tolerated as a deviation, and yet still be seen only as another way to live" (Williams 1980:41).

Williams' analysis is useful in that it insightfully picks up on the fact that these two types of cultural practice are not always mutually exclusive. Similar to Williams, I view the incorporation of working class culture into rap as an incomplete process. In addition, I do not view alternative culture as a necessarily apolitical or fully co-opted culture.

Rap must be analyzed historically. To begin with, rap changes its message, content, and aesthetic when it is commercialized. From the beginning, rap was not entirely revolutionary in an oppositional sense. There was no organized effort to formally politicize rap outside of the Afro-centric movement of the early 1990s that began in the US and had reflections in the UK. In the UK, the most commercial aspect of rap ended in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, in an alternative sense, like today, rap is still practiced on the local level in places such as the

neighborhoods in which I studied. Rap's effectiveness as a way to communicate does not rely on formal political institutions. Many people in and out of rap feel marginalized or uninterested in formal politics and therefore do not feel the need to participate. This is not tied to their involvement in rap or the commercialization of hip hop, but weak political options with few results or projects aimed at them.

Rap exists on many levels ranging from the highly commercialized to the underground of everyday practice. One has to explore the meanings of rap to the members of the various rap communities to understand the level of co-optation that is involved with rap. Rap and hip hop culture encompass both the commercial and the underground sides of the music. It is the point at which rap is solely characterized by the mainstream that gives rise to discussions of rap's complete commodification. However, because rap music and hip hop culture are represented as commercialized art forms does not mean that they cannot also be seen as alternative cultural forms with the potential to address particular issues, affect change or be used as a teaching and learning tool.

An important feature of rap is its ability to address

and maintain the dialectic between mainstream and non-mainstream. This tension constantly came up during my interviews and throughout my entire research experience. My aim is not to valorize rap music. Much of the critiques leveled at rap are well thought out and constructive. However, there needs to be more specificity in the critique that addresses the diversity of the people and experiences involved in rap music and hip hop culture. As my research reveals, all people involved in rap do not practice it in same way. For example, in London there is an underground of artists and participants throughout the rap community who do not participate in rap in public spaces. Many of my informants did not attend popular rap functions, as they felt that this did not represent the type of rap that they were involved in or wanted to create. The rap community in which I studied was very particular concerning economic success and involvement in the recording industry. In conversations with my informants it appears that in recent years, in rap music, a simultaneous embrace of consumerism, critique, and sense of alienation has evolved. How rap negotiates this dialectic in London will determine if it will remain a viable practice to its members in the future.

Rap and Globalization

The movement of hip hop from the US can be seen as part of a current of ideas that moves between populations. Here, Arjun Appadurai's concept of "scape" seems appropriate in capturing the processes and relations that are involved as rap moves, mutates, and is created in its various settings (Appadurai 1996; 1990). A scape is a way to characterize the flow of global cultural movement that influences the practices of local groups. Rather than place cultural flows into a linear relationship between core and periphery, the scape captures the intense interactions that occur as a result of the movement of capital, people, ideas, media, and technology. The scape is an extremely useful analytical tool. However, as King (1997) points out, the concept of scape presents the movement of culture between groups as chaotic and directionless. In this formulation, explaining the process of movement is given precedence over what happens to people when culture moves. In addition, I further question how this idea of cultural movement treats racial and class difference. In my research, I saw that these "categories" have a significant impact on the route that cultural movement assumes and in turn how culture is practiced.

I would add a distinct sense of direction to this

formulation that makes these practices both local and global at the same time. Going against the view of globalization as merely a form of homogenization (Barber 1992), Robertson (1995) seeks a more nuanced view of the relationship between global processes and the local. He terms this relationship "glocalization"--a tension between heterogeneity and homogeneity seen in the localization of globalized culture. He states that,

The debate about global homogenization versus heterogenization should be transcended. It is not a question of either homogenization or heterogenization, but rather of ways in which both these two tendencies have become features of life across much of the late twentieth-century world (Robertson 1995:27).

This tension is further evidence of the complexity that is involved in defining the relationship between rap's movement and its practice in local surroundings.

In many cases, the idea of cultural flows can be taken to suggest a dizzying movement of ideas and people between groups in a sometimes random direction. In the case of rap, I see the flow of culture in a less random direction, being influenced by relations between diasporic populations. As will be discussed in later chapters, diasporic populations are linked indelibly through cultural practices, histories and experiences. The flow of culture between these groups is quite pointed, assuming a distinct trajectory. In this

sense, the movement of rap represents one of the most contemporary examples of diasporic cultural flow. For example, my research showed groups returning from visits to the US where they saw family and other personal relations and became exposed to the US practice of rap and hip hop culture. In turn, they took this experience back to the UK. To some UK blacks at least, US blacks constitute the cultural and political vanguard of the black diaspora.

Reading Rap

In the global context, many groups listen to rap music and emulate the imagery of the US. The trend in rap in the global sense is to represent one's own surroundings through the local dialect and slang. However, certain themes in rap persist regardless of where it is practiced. For example, the gangsta [gangster] and more recently the thug [outlaw] motif have been some of the most enduring images and rap styles found. Globally, rap seems fixated on these categories that were produced in the US and incorporated into other rap communities. How people involved in rap address hegemonic images that hinder more diverse representations is an issue that goes beyond merely viewing how people in various locations are making rap their own.

In London, a tension exists between the US and local forms of rap. This idea is picked up in the next chapter. Here, people on the local level must negotiate the relationship between totalizing concepts of culture that impinge on local practices or succumb to forms of American rap hegemony.

Rap is no longer at the global cross-roads. It has steadily moved to create satellites throughout the world. It calls into question readings of popular culture depending on where and in what period one examines its practice. In regards to rap, the commodification of it as a genre has been constant. However, this commodification is not uniform and has different levels depending on which country's rap is being discussed. We must begin to consider different types of rap and hip hop culture(s) in examinations of rap's movement and practice. My aim here in discussing oppositional and alternative cultures is to draw attention to the shift in popularity of rap and the way that this shift has influenced some, but not all, rap music and the wider culture. I feel that the increasing popularity of rap music and hip hop culture within popular culture raises interesting questions regarding the accepted dichotomies between resistance and co-optation, mainstream

and underground, the global and local, and consumer and expressive forms of culture.

CHAPTER THREE

RAP in LONDON

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the practice of rap in London. Although never exclusively a black practice, in the early period it appears that the messages and the imagery found in rap music resonated in a particular way with black working class youth and white working class youth. To discuss this, I look at the musical aspect--rap's lyrics, subject matter and musical influences. In addition, I examine the social side of rap music as I discuss how race and class are involved in the practice of rap. My research suggests that rap music is created according to local surroundings and social conditions rather than being created wholesale through unmediated processes. To demonstrate this I will focus on some of the key practices in the music that make London rap unique.

The research process included time spent with my primary informants in their homes, neighborhoods, and clubs where I was able to capture the localized practice of rap.

However, the research was not confined to these areas. Obviously, both the informants and rap travel outside of these settings. Though my main point of entry was my informants, as I moved through the rap community, other people with different viewpoints, whose practice of rap differed from that of my primary informants became apparent. These differences greatly enriched the ethnographic aspects of the project, as well as its overall depth.

Interestingly, my two research groups--the independent and the reality rappers--had much in common. The points of similarity and difference will be discussed throughout the chapter. Moreover, as is mentioned throughout this dissertation, race and class did not necessarily dictate one's experience in relation to rap. In both research groups, I found divergent understandings of the music. At the same time, the groups overlapped regarding venues that they attended, some of the music they listened to, and held a number of similar ideas concerning the state of rap and its future. It is the points where experiences converge and fragment that I want to address.

Section I. Period I (1985-1994)

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of the early stages of rap music's development in London. This description is based on popular accounts concerning the people and events that were significant to the practice of rap in London during the era.

A. Background History

Rap in London was pre-dated by the electro movement. Electro, like rap, incorporated themes and elements of popular culture to develop music that reflected the time and space in which it was created. Electro was electronically generated music that produced a musical aesthetic that paralleled the time period's fascination with nascent computer technology, early video games and special effects seen in movies. Electro featured synthesizer driven melodies oftentimes with sparse vocals that were electronically manipulated to sound mechanical or computer derived, almost machine like. Its fast tempo made it suited to dance styles with quick movements. One commentator described electro as "a fusion of metal music of the eighties, and a hard edged, ugly, beautiful, trance as stimulating as New York itself" (Toop 1984a).

In London, a rather eclectic mix of people were

exposed to electro. Popular accounts note the presence of punks, and a cross section of racial and class elements. Malcolm McClaren, the former manager of the punk band the Sex Pistols, introduced the UK to electro through the catchy and marketable song *Buffalo Girls*. Here, various types of people were brought together through a common interest in music, curiosity and by chance. While electro was embraced in hip hop dance circles, the additional elements of hip hop culture would soon become introduced to the UK and young people would pick up on these.

One of the first rap songs released in the UK was by a London artist named Newtrament in 1985. It was appropriately called *London Bridge is Falling Down*. Opening with a repeated chime of Big Ben and rapped over a synthesized bass line, the song commented on the poor state of Thatcher's Britain. The musical and female backing vocals of the song gave the record a light feel, but it was an early attempt to reflect the everyday experience of working class London through music.

Mastermind Roadshow, the name of a sound system¹ that played rap and electro music, came into prominence during

¹ A sound system is a mobile sound-producing unit originally associated with playing reggae music. It features large

the mid 1980s. Mastermind's members were well-known for their sessions at clubs and especially at the Notting Hill Carnival². Herbie, the founder of the Mastermind Crew, became interested in playing rap music after hearing the American hip hop dee jay technique of using two turntables to play records and manipulate breaks³ creating extended mixes of songs. Mastermind's departure from playing primarily reggae became clear as they incorporated the two turntable style versus the one turn table technique previously used when playing reggae. This allowed records to be played simultaneously and merged together at will rather than playing them one after another. The group's musical focus was then electro, soul and rap.

In addition to public displays of rap in London, a half-hour documentary called *Bad Meaning Good* (1985) was produced by the state-funded BBC 2 (British Broadcasting Corporation) television network and hosted by UK rap mainstay Tim Westwood. He will be discussed further in

speakers that can produce massive sounds, a dee jay, and a crew of people who perform tasks in the group.

² Carnival is Europe's largest street festival attracting over a million people over several days. It is a celebration of soca music and is widely seen as a "black" event although others participate.

³ Breaks are sections of songs that feature musical interludes such as drum or bass solos. It is sometimes

chapter five. Because BBC 2 is a nationally televised network the documentary aired throughout the entire UK. Featuring performances and interviews with UK and US rap artists, the program was a primary introduction to hip hop culture and specifically rap for much of the hip hop community in the UK. *Bad Meaning Good* relayed the idea that rap could be done and was being done by British youth. The documentary gave the impression that hip hop was open to interpretation and was not only an American phenomenon. *Bad Meaning Good* located hip hop in an urban black British context as the documentary's performances were by black UK artists in small venues with intimate settings. Certain British styles of rapping were also featured such as the ragga [general term meaning rough] muffin hip hop style of London Posse this style will be discussed later in the chapter.

In the initial stages of hip hop's development, London had several meeting places. The main place was Covent Garden in Central London's West End. Popular accounts report that approximately one thousand people from London as well as throughout the UK congregated there on a weekly basis to engage in at least one of the four aspects of hip

referred to as the most "musical" part of the song.

hop culture—rap, graffiti, break dancing and dee jaying. Dancers especially benefited from this congregation as they busked, that is, danced for money. This was in line with Covent Garden's reputation for supporting street performance. Ladbroke Grove in West London and Clapham Common in South London were also areas with significant hip hop activity. The general feeling by informants and the media concerning this period was that hip hop had taken the country, especially London, by storm.

A series of venues that catered to hip hop youth were in place during this time. Clubs such as Spats, Language Lab and The Wag in the West End and Electric Ballroom in Camden provided spaces for performances and competitions. During this period, hip hop was seen as encompassing the four elements noted before as compared to seeing only rap as the most important part as is the case today. During this time, most of the mcs were black⁴. In addition, there was a mix of rap styles that were British as well as imitations of the popular American style of rap.

A first hand type of borrowing emerged as US artists

⁴ In a content analysis of the images of rappers in Tim Westwood's Hip Hop Column in *Blues and Soul* magazine in 1985, approximately three quarters of the rappers featured were black. At the time, this column was a consistent source of hip hop related information and events.

came to perform in London to "teach" people what hip hop's culture encompassed. In addition, tapes of New York rap radio shows such as Afrika Islam's Zulu Beat dating from the mid 1980s were circulated between individuals soon after their original airing in the US. This was done between friends in the neighborhoods and at school among other places. In addition, personal networks gave some individuals the chance to visit relatives and associates in the US, seeing the practice of rap and hip hop first hand. Illustrating the wide appeal of hip hop at the time, a black informant recalls his interaction with a Canadian cousin in the Caribbean,

When hip hop came it gave man [people] an alternative. Hip hop took people away from the reggae scene. You had the writers, the *Wild Style* movie⁵. My cousins who came from Canada showed me poppin' moves [early hip hop dance technique] when I saw them in Bermuda on vacation. When I came back [Feb 1983], Buffalo Girls was in the charts and all my friends were poppin'. Everything changed.

During this time, American artists were regular visitors to London. In addition, the hip hop cultural organization known as the Zulu Nation led by hip hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa [Bam] made a number of appearances

⁵ *Wild Style* introduced much of mainstream America to the concept of hip hop culture. It is considered one of the most enduring hip hop movies ever made. It is also a term used to describe a particular style of graffiti.

in order to promote the music and philosophies. The Zulu Nation is a hip hop cultural organization that promotes unity through involvement in hip hop culture. Bambaataa was a former gang member who used hip hop related competitions in his South Bronx neighborhood to address tensions between rival groups. Bambaataa took the name Zulu from the movie *Shaka Zulu*. His imagination was captured by the way that the Zulus in the movie fought and resisted the British under colonial authority. He established a chapter of the Zulu Nation in the UK.

Several of my informants situated hip hop within a material context. In the mid 1980s the Greater London Council (GLC) funded recreation and artistic programs that were geared towards under-represented groups. The groups were considered marginalized, based on class, race, gender and sexual preference. In relation to black arts, GLC funding provided for: local parties, the establishment of community centers and venues for the practice of dance and vocal performances. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party disbanded the GLC in 1986 and with this funding ceased for arts-based projects. One such place that had been funded by the GLC was The Center in Covent Garden, where dancers came together to practice their routines. As one informant

remarked concerning the severity of the GLC's closing, "the GLC was abolished and it took a few years before the pain set in."

B. Rap's Early Practice

London has a tradition of birthing skilled rappers. From the mid 1980s, artists such Dizzy Heights and MC Duke and several years later Overlord X and Sindicut attempted to cultivate a UK sound and style of rapping that encompassed a British accent and spoke about local circumstances. The early period showed the influence of female mcs such as Monie Love. She teamed up with South London compatriot MC Mello to make music. They formed what was at that time called the DETT (Determination Endeavor and Total Triumph) Inc Crew. Monie Love, the most well known female British mc, went on to move to the US where she collaborated with US rappers such as Queen Latifah, who was a part of the collective of rappers known as The Native Tongues. At this time, another expatriate, Slick Rick, also began a highly successful career in the US, gaining a reputation as a gifted rapper with an art for storytelling in rhyme. UK female duos, The Cookie Crew and The Wee Papa Girls, found a degree of success and reached the national

music charts. Unfortunately, however, the early presence of female rappers waned and has yet to be regained. While British in accent, these early artists borrowed heavily from the US style of rapping, including vocabulary and delivery. In many ways, these artists are the forerunners to the mixed UK/US rap style that I call the mid Atlantic style. This style will be further discussed in the next chapter.

In 1986 a number of record labels that supported UK rap and electro came into existence. One of the more notable labels was Street Sounds which was started by Morgan Khan and it specialized in electro compilations. Another label of importance was Music of Life, known for releasing artists such as Derek B, one of the UK's most commercially successful rappers at this time⁶. He saw chart success with his song *Good Groove* that reached #16. An appearance on the long-running nationally televised music show *Top of the Pops* confirmed his appeal outside of the rap community. Rap fans, however, criticized Derek B as an imitator of American rap and instead called for a more British style.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the rap groups

⁶ Marks (1990) and Mitchell (1996) discuss early commercial

Hijack, Silvah Bullet and Gunshot set themselves apart from other rap groups by developing a fast style of rapping and an attendant musical intensity. This fast rap style came to characterize much of UK rap music during the time. The groups rapped to beats that were approximately 120 bpm [beats per minute], as much as 20 percent-25 percent faster than more traditionally paced rap songs. Foreshadowing the rise of Britain's first indigenous black music genre, jungle, Rebel MC developed his own style of quick frenetic rap. Rap group Katch 22 was also influential during the early 1990s. They combined socially conscious lyrics with accessible beats to become distinguished members of the rap community. In response to the group's political message, Radio 1, prohibited the airing of Katch 22's 1991 release *Diary of a Blackman Living in the Land of the Lost* due to its use of a National Front⁷ sound bite.

Another manifestation of politics in UK rap was the formation of a collective of black rappers called B.R.O.T.H.E.R. [Black Rhyme Organisation To Help Equal Rights] in 1989. B.R.O.T.H.E.R. joined with black MP [Member of Parliament] Bernie Grant to protest apartheid.

rap music in the UK.

⁷ The National Front (NF) is a right wing political organization.

This song was also seen as a way to address the boundaries that the UK erected against black youth, creating divisions between blacks and whites similar to South Africa. The record opens with a statement by Grant which says, "The parallel also applies in Britain when white racists say that black people, especially youth, cannot go any further." Proceeds from the song went to the ANC.

During the early 1990s rap in London did not appear destined for wide spread commercial success. In turn, the popularity of rap declined or at least reached an equilibrium. In addition, the emergence of jungle/drum and bass attracted many people from rap and hip hop backgrounds to become involved with what was considered at that time an indigenous black British music. Jungle began in the late 1980s but became popular in the early 1990s. Those who participated in the movement, junglists, fused several musical elements together: the deep bass line of reggae, sampled lyrics from rap or reggae songs, and the up-tempo pace of electronic dance music. Much like early rap music in the US, the mc spoke quickly repeating lyrics and catch phrases to excite the crowd while the music played. Here,

the chatting and toasting⁸ approach to lyrical delivery is adapted from the reggae sound system concept. Like hip hop music, jungle began by creatively re-interpreting the rhythms, beats, and melodies from other black musics along with other genres to create a new musical form.

In the early to mid-1990s, rap went underground as major label interest subsided. Rap music as a genre was still seen in public, but the cultural side of it was practiced less openly, in places that were not widely publicized. When I asked informants where rap went in this period, they remarked that although the masses lost interest, the "true" rap fans did not. They promoted the music through informal networks of performers and friends. During this period, London rappers increasingly sought to develop new styles of rapping that would define London lyricists.

C. Ragga Hip Hop

One of the most localized forms of rap during the early period was found in the ragga muffin hip hop style. Artists like Asher D and Daddy Freddy, Demon Boyz and London Posse pioneered this style. As a marker of the style

⁸ Chatting and toasting are styles of verbal delivery that

and of black British identity, ragga muffin hip hop illustrated the contradictions that were seen in being black and British. It combined Jamaican, British and American speech and slang, reggae rhythms like dub, with hip hop beats and production techniques. In the 1980s many black youth were caught between the "island" culture of their parents--who were from places like Jamaica--and an evolving black British culture. This black British culture not only included, British, West Indian, and African culture, but also the influence of America, especially black America. This process is discussed by one of the ragga muffin hip hop artists, Devestate, a member of the Demon Boyz. He said "instead of us rapping in English/American we'd do Jamaican/American with a bit of British thrown in so it's just the full culture" (Smash 1989).

The style effectively brought the cultural influences and experiences of this generation of black youth to rap music and hip hop culture. An example of the music is seen in London Posse's 1993 release *How Is Life in London?* This track opens with the sound of Big Ben's chime followed by a sample of the introduction to a BBC News broadcast

are associated with reggae music.

including the quotes "BBC World Service Presents" (pause)
 "This is London". Within seconds the two rappers, Bionic
 and Rodney P, begin a dialogue voiced in the group's London
 patois. They rap,

Wha' happen, nuff tings a gwan. Me hear unu lan
 [What's happening. A lot. I heard that you just
 returned to town]
 Una big it up in New Yawk?
 [Did you have a good time in New York?]
 Sure me bad it up becau me like dem fi know, dem a
 roughneck in a Ingran
 [Yes, I did and I wanted them to know that there are
 rough necks - (hard core rappers/people) in England]
 Yu a joke, ya yout, you a lan back den?
 [You're funny, you're like a youth. Are you going
 back?]
 Fa real me a tell dem a little som'tin
 [Definitely, I will tell them something, when I
 return]
 I tell dem about the raddies and the baddies on the
 manor
 [I will tell them about how tough people in my
 neighborhood]
 The ones who roll thick and quick to flip like Bruce
 Banna
 [The one's that travel in packs, and can get mean like
 Bruce Banner (the Incredible Hulk's real name)]
 Check my gramma, the girls in Japan love the slang
 [Pay attention to the way I talk. The girls in
 Japan like my slang]
 And the ones in Manhattan love the chattin' so we'll
 see knows prattin'
 [And the girls in Manhattan love the way I talk so
 we'll see who is playing around]

Chorus

When we go to Tokyo-They go how's the life in London?
 And all the sexy Yardie gal dem a talk bout-how's the
 life in London?
 [All the sexy Jamaican girls ask how's the Life in
 London?]

And the weedman in Amsterdam says how's the life in London?
[And the marijuana sellers in Amsterdam ask how's the Life in London?]
A wa yu tell dem?
[And what did you tell them?]
Boy a wah yu fi listen the way I strung em'
[Boy, I want you to listen to the way I control things (in London)]

The music of this group brings up several interesting points. The group's name, London Posse, showed its Jamaican influence by using the word posse, which creates an image of a group that is strong, united and determined. This use plays on previous generations of Jamaicans' fascination with the posses found in cowboy movies known as spaghetti westerns. These movies featured heroic and strong figures in the "wild" west and their gun slinging battles. An example of such a figure is the Outlaw Josie Wales. What was important here was to co-opt the outlaw characteristics of the main characters of these movies. The term posse also connotes strength in numbers as well as a forbidding presence. The three members of London Posse were trying to convey the idea of unity and strength. Interestingly, in the 1980s and 1990s the British press used the term posse to stereotypically label Jamaican drug selling gangs.

Obviously, the prefix "London" put the group's point of reference squarely in London. The song's central content

is everyday experience in London. The group utilizes a London centered vocabulary that is communicated through black street slang. London Posse then makes connections to an international context by naming places that the group has visited while on tour at which point they are asked, How's the Life in London? This sound brought the reggae vocal style and sensibility together with references to London over a hip hop backing track, drum beat and bass line.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the use of the American and West Indian influences in music was seen by some commentators as an acknowledgment that people of West Indian descent in the UK did not have a culture of their own to rap about. Therefore, it became necessary for them to look to the US and the West Indies for cultural direction. A writer states,

With such a strong Jamaican influence within modern British society and because most Jamaicans have only lived in the UK since the second world war, it's hardly surprising that young kids don't have their own British culture they can rhyme about (Smash 1990).

What this commentator misses is that using outside influences is what is involved in the making of culture in the general sense and hip hop culture more specifically. The creation of rap music for example always involves using

outside influences as well as those that are familiar, combining them in an original way to create something that fits into what hip hop entails. Through the medium of music, this ragga hip hop style synthesized the diasporic experiences of movement from the West Indies with the experience of living in the UK, using black US cultural tools. This was black London's attempt at diasporic cultural assemblage. The name ragga hip hop did not last, but the influence on a segment of current rappers remains evident.

Section II. Period II. (1995-The Present)

This section provides insight into the contemporary practice of rap in London, especially the variant characterized as "underground" or non-mainstream. I focus attention on how this underground status is derived and maintained by examining a number of key issues that impact the rap community.

A. Contemporary Context

Since the early 1990s, rap has gone through several changes in London. It has been increasingly de-Americanized, meaning that the American influence has

become lessened in London rap styles. Among my informants, a homegrown movement has taken shape that devalues mcs that rap in American accents. In addition, the community has split along racial lines. This split will be discussed later in the chapter. Rap is produced and consumed in the UK on both the mainstream and underground level. Mainstream rap is produced for a general record buying population that has little knowledge of hip hop culture. I term this type of music popular rap. It uses a rhyming musical scheme that relies on lyrics that are easy to remember and recite. The lyrics have a light hearted sentiment and discuss topics such as interpersonal relationships and recreation.

The other way that rap is produced is for the underground. This is what will be discussed in the remainder of the chapter. Here, underground refers to a style of music as well as the way that the music is produced and consumed. Underground rap is made by and for those who have been involved in hip hop for an extended period of time. These people produce rap music independently of major record companies. Their music tends to be less formulaic than popular rap and is more experimental in its use of musical influences. In the UK,

the underground is very concerned with "keeping it British" which means that they insist on rapping in a British accent, unlike the commercial rappers who sound American.

Most mcs in the underground focus on displaying their lyrical ability and skill. This makes the sound accessible to a crowd that has discriminating taste in relation to rap. These artists tend to take the production of the music seriously. At times, this attitude causes conflict as people take criticism of their music personally. This has led to fragmentation within the community and such divisions create racial and class divides between the rappers. In addition, rappers are often divided into camps or groups that produce music together. These groups are based on neighborhood, area of the city and region. A situation exists whereby access to few resources has led to intense competition and nepotism, which includes racial and class components.

The relatively low level of sales of UK rap raises interesting questions concerning the perception of what is considered a viable rap community and what is not. How does rap survive without a commercial impetus? Does it cease to be rap when there is little or no commercial success to be

had? What happens to rap music and the culture of hip hop in non-commercialized places? These are important questions that need to be asked as the global commercialization of rap music increases and the mainstream and underground merge or, as in the case of the UK, fragment.

In 1998, Britain became the third largest record buying market in the world. This did not translate into high sales for UK rap however. The British record industry treats rap as part of wider category of up-tempo music classed as rhythm and blues (r & b)⁹ and dance music. This influences which artists are chosen to sign record contracts and the way that the music is marketed. Here, rappers are signed who can produce music that people can dance to. This is not the type of rap that rappers in the London underground produce. Dance music is one type of music that is marketed to the record buying public. In 1998 r & b, including rap, accounted for 4.7 per cent of the total music sales in the UK. Of this, 18 per cent was rap, mainly from the US (BPI Marketing Report 1999).

A successful UK rap album in the UK would equate to sales of about 20,000 records, which by international standards is small. Due to the lack of commercial success,

⁹ R & b is an urban contemporary music genre most closely

independent record labels and artist owned labels are responsible the production and distribution of most of the music. Correspondingly, UK rap remains a non-mainstream music practiced throughout London in networks of venues and events. In the UK, a situation exists where the influence of rap and hip hop are best seen in dress, speech and in varying degrees in the music of British youth. However, this has not figured into sales of rap produced in the UK. The status of rap in London is more developed than, but is somewhat analogous to, the status of rap in countries such as Cuba and South Africa. In these places, rap has a grass roots following and is practiced by poor groups that do not have access to large recording facilities or have large record distribution networks. Therefore, they do not usually rap for profit, but are more involved in its cultural aspects. This leads to the question--in a place where the popularity of rap is less mediated by the press, do rappers have a vested interest in the content of the music?

Media involvement is not totally absent from these situations, however. While in London, Shaheem, a rapper from the South African rap group Prophets of Da City told

associated with soul music.

me that neighboring townships had been influenced by media-led depictions of US rap. Sometimes, townships became involved in arguments over whether the East Coast or the West Coast of the US produced the best rap music. They became involved in heated rivalries concerning what deceased US rapper they liked the most, Tupac Shakur (West Coast rapper) or the Notorious B.I.G. (East Coast rapper). In addition, Shaheem lamented the underdeveloped nature of rap in South Africa and the fact that it is difficult for rap fans to get certain rap records and publications. Like in other places, in parts of South Africa, music videos, magazines and other print media have had a profound influence on the perception of rap music and rap performers.

Meanwhile, in the UK, underground rap is slowly beginning to gain exposure in the mainstream. This is seen through certain media outlets such as the recently initiated Digital MTV's "Hip Hop Review" that features music videos from UK and US artists. This show is on a network called MTV Base that features urban, mostly black-oriented music programming. In addition, Radio 1 is in the process of starting an all black on-line digital music station. Tentatively called Network X, it will feature

music from the UK and US such as hip hop, r & b and UK garage¹⁰. The impact of these outlets on underground rap is not yet known as they are in their beginning stages. However, they represent additional places where the music can gain exposure. In addition, the 2000 release of the album entitled *If It's Not 100% UK Hip Hop You Can Have Your Money Back* signals the first commercially available UK rap compilation available in the last four years. Whether these events will lead to increased sales and exposure will have to be watched.

When looking at the commercial prospects for UK rap it is worth noting that my informants are not opposed to a commercial surge in underground UK rap. For example, one group of informants, 12 Stone, produced, recorded, and distributed their own album. In addition, Albert, a solo rapper who is also an informant, put out a single on his own volition. Task Force, another group of informants, underwent a UK tour during my fieldwork period. As mentioned previously, there are a wealth of smaller rap music labels that are artist owned and/or run such as K' Boro Records, Low Life Records, Bad Majic and FastFwd as well as other labels such as Big Dada that release rap

¹⁰ Garage or Two Step is an up-tempo dance music that is

records.

The informants discussed their desire to be able to support themselves through rapping alone. Those who were involved in the informal economy claimed that this was merely a way to gain income in order to survive as well as put money back into the production of the music. However, they want monetary success under certain terms, as they do not want to produce pop rap for a mainstream audience. In addition, my informants were often cautious because they have experienced or heard stories of UK rappers' unsuccessful involvement in the record industry.

The tendency in UK rap has been for a rapper or group to have some success in the underground and then be picked up by a major record label. However, when this happens, the rapper or group is notoriously poorly marketed and mishandled by the record company. If the artist does not sell well, the company will not want to sign more rap artists. This was the case with the rap group Brotherhood. In 1995 they signed a several album record deal with Virgin Records. Their first album did not sell as well as expected and they were quickly dropped from the label. According to a member of the group, they were not seen as an investment

popular among UK youth.

by the record company, but instead were expected to become successful immediately on their own without proper support and marketing. When this did not happen, they were left without a record contract. My informant also told me that the people who were handling his group's marketing were not from an urban background nor did they have knowledge of how to sell the music to an urban audience. He stated,

The record executives were white college kids. They didn't know what they were doing. All they were interested in was doing charlie [slang term for cocaine]. We weren't interested in that. We didn't fit in.

A major irony in relation to increasing the commercial viability of London rap lies in the fact that the rappers who are the most skilled and accomplished and in a position to become commercially successful consciously remain in the underground. It is reported that a popular underground rapper turned down a lucrative advance from SONY, a major record label, because he wanted to maintain creative control of his music. In addition, the underground artists want to rap in a British accent, in contrast to the popular rappers who rap in an American accent in order to sell more records and get into the national music charts.

A sense of complexity is added to this situation by

the fact that the UK's main rap radio show, the Radio 1 Rap Show hosted by Tim Westwood, plays mostly US rap commercial rap music. It is one of the highest rated shows on the entire radio station. It reaches all of Britain (potentially upwards of 55 million people) as well as parts of Europe through syndication. This makes it one of the most widely heard radio shows in the world. Westwood publishes a weekly list of the UK's top 10 rap records and it is not uncommon for up to seven to nine of the artists to be from the US. Once a month Westwood simulcasts his radio show from New York with popular dee jay Funkmaster Flex from radio station 97.1 WQHT or Hot 97 as it is called. Through speech and musical selection, Westwood replicates the Hot 97 format on Radio 1 as he uses much of the same phrasing and plays the same records. Both UK and US artists have called his preference for US artists into question. My informants all expressed disdain and frustration concerning Westwood's policies. In fact, several years ago, KRS-1, a popular US rapper, confronted Westwood during a live broadcast interview concerning his lack of support for UK artists. Because of pressure from artists, Westwood has only recently started to play UK rap more prominently on his show. It remains to be seen whether

this exposure will translate into major record company interest for UK rap.

Unfortunately, the idea of mcs collaborating to produce a more coherent scene perhaps further elevating the level of the music, is not necessarily practiced. A largely under-represented aspect in the study of rap is the production of poor sounding rap. During the course of the research I heard phenomenal rap as well as cacophonous rap. Although I heard low quality rap music, the majority of the rap that I heard was of a high standard. The divisions within the community, however, would not allow quality rap to be heard en masse, acknowledged and supported. When I asked my informants why there was so much disunity, they often remarked that lack of support and not being allowed to express approval of one's productions in general were characteristics commonly found among British rappers.

B. The London Sound

The London rap sound uses sparse beats and flat bass lines giving it a less textured and dense sound than in the US. UK underground rap does not have a noticeable "bounce" or upbeat quality to it. This defines some of its underground feeling, meaning that it is better suited for

listening to than for dancing. It privileges lyrical dexterity and narrative over dancability. Underground rap also has a "stripped" down sound lacking recognizable "hooks" or catch phrases that make the songs more accessible to a mainstream audience. Rap in London has no one sound, but instead has trends that have run through the music depending on the localized slant that mcs put into their lyrics, dialect and speech while rapping. The approach to rap in London not only utilizes a London accent but also relies on switching between a London accent and the slang or dialect of the artist's background and neighborhood. This method, for example, reflects the way in which people of West Indian and African descent and other non-European groups who were born in the UK are now attempting to develop more indigenous styles that are based on their black or multi-racial British working class experience. To be black is to exist with other blacks and to have multi-racial contacts and influences.

The rappers whom I studied saw themselves as part of the London underground rap scene. London rap is experimental and fragmented along lines of musical influences, performance, style and the mood of the music. Two styles that I most often saw are what I termed "Afro-

British" and "traditional British". Both groups of my informants, reality and independent rappers, use these styles. Afro-British rappers use a Jamaican reggae influenced vocal style, pattern and delivery. The traditional British use a cockney [London] accent. The styles are reflective of the cultural and racial backgrounds of the rappers who are in the rap community. Regardless of the style that is used, the rappers consider themselves to be UK rappers. It should be stressed that these stylistic names are created for the purpose of discussion. They are not mutually exclusive and at certain points, rappers in some cases use both styles.

C. Current Styles of Rap

1. Afro British Rap Style

Several examples will illustrate the elements that are involved in creating Afro-British rap music. Some of the most well known rappers in the underground are Blak Twang, Roots Manuva and Task Force, all of who incorporate West Indian and London-based language into their raps. This is their way of keeping their music, themes, and approach to rap British. Subsequently, being British is to use patois and London accents with a small degree of American

influence, mainly in the form of vocabulary. The style owes some influence to the mix between the reggae and rap style that was popularized by groups like London Posse. The Afro-British style of rap uses a traditional approach to rhyming with some added reggae influences in the vocabulary and delivery. It reflects the West Indian heritage or influence of the members of this group. This heritage, however, is moderated by the black British reality and space in which the rappers exist.

Solo rapper Roots Manuva has a unique style that uses a South London drawl with a delivery that maintains an off-and-on relationship with the beat. Roots may not be on beat all the time, but his delivery is calculated to exist in a rhythmic relation to the beat. This means that rather than maintaining the same rhythm throughout the rap, he raps on and sometimes around the beat. Definitely experimental in nature, his flow is unique and is a good example of what London rap can sound like when it maintains a degree of West Indian influence especially in the use of accent, beats, and rhythms. On his album *Brand New Second Hand*, Roots offers examples of the full range of black British music, from hip hop to ragga¹¹ to drum and bass beats. The

¹¹ Ragga, sometimes called "dancehall" or "bashment" music,

way that Roots raps--word choice, flow/cadence, and themes--are British. He remains within the genre of rap but with a reggae influenced sounding voice and style. For example, in *Juggle Tings Propa* [*Juggle Things Proper*] he raps,

(Chorus)

Boom Wha Dis, [What's this]
 Wha Dat [What's that]
 Watch dese, [Watch these]
 in times we act
 How we juggle tings propa [How we handle situations
 appropriately]
 Jump fo yo stash [Guard what you have]

This living dead noose, the game of life
 In the West, who's down fu [for] simple unrest?
 In times likes these comrades is hard to find
 The beast keeps the masses towin' the line
 With dem [them] sneaky tactics, they'll keep dem boys
 runnin'
 So dey have the market fu [for] de [the] guns and
 ammunition
 Keep the third world in a stagnant position
 We don't seem to keen to write off the third world
 debt,
 cause they profit from holdin' it down
 Soon they'll be no dollars, no yens, no pounds
 Just machines, microchips and high tech war
 And all because the beast [authority/police] wants to
 gain control of each and every mind, body and soul.

In this song, Roots' lyrics speak to a politically informed commentary that does not always exist in rap. In

is a reggae derivative that features thick patois vocals rapped over a dominating bass. The lyrics are sometimes considered harsh due to their focus on Jamaican street life.

London, the rappers from working class backgrounds tend to be critical of the economic and political dynamics of the UK. This translates into some of their music at various points. Roots' discussion in the lyrics "this living dead noose, the game of life/In the West, who's down fu simple unrest" speaks to the need to politically mobilize against inequality.

Topics such as the third world's economic position and debt relief show a more global approach to mixing rap and politics in Roots' music. References to the police and general authority figures as the "beast" show his Jamaican and black British reference point. The emergency number in Jamaica for the police is 999. This number turned upside down is 666, which in biblical terms represents a number associated with evil. In turn, this number has become associated with law enforcement because of strained relations between blacks and the police. Not all of Roots' music is political in nature, but he was one of the more politically aware rappers whom I encountered. He showed different ways that rap can be used to discuss not only recreation but also issues of politics and how a song can be, in his words, "a soldier's theme" (Stacey 1999:41). Here, soldier is a reference to those people, especially

blacks, who struggle daily as if they were in the military. Roots has taken the imagery of reggae and Jamaican culture by using the term soldier in the same way that London Posse, as discussed earlier, used the term posse to connote strength. In some cases, I heard the term soldier refer to people who, although undergoing strife, maintain a positive outlook. Soldier was also turned into a verb and the term "soldiering" something was used to mean surviving a situation.

The group Task Force, made up of rappers Charles and Fred, illustrate the cultural mixture that is seen in rap in London. They will be discussed further in chapter five. They are white rappers from North London who grew up with a high degree of exposure to black culture. This influence is prominent in their speech, dress and demeanor. Task Force's music can be described as hip hop psychedelia with a ragga presence in the form of North London street rap. Their record collection, from which they have taken samples for their music, is diverse, ranging from movie sound tracks to rap to folk music. Their songs have different sides to them from playful to harder edged. In *Graforiginess*, a play on the word aborigines, Task Force describe their early experiences as graffiti writers and rappers in London. They

rap,

(Chorus)

The streets are getting spray coz' I'd rather be a graffer [graffiti artist] than a player [womanizer],
 Bare [many] buses and trains and train lay ups,
 Getting sprayed up in the moon light,
 all graffer worldwide grab your pens and paint, then
 go put and vandalize and just hi-light your names, tag
 [write] a mans' name der pon [write a person's name]
 it,
 If your backs against a wall turn around and write on
 it.

We passed Hackney, leaving it blamed [painted] up real
 badly, next stops Homerton,
 We reminisced on what had been,
 Remember when we used to move [hang out with] with Nok
 from RCS [person from a graffiti crew],
 How could I forget the old school, them days was dett
 [detrimental/great].
 What about the ragga muffin scarecrows, from Clapton
 Square,
 Yeah them brays [people] were dark [mean] all the
 while proper vile,
 Listening to our London Posse and their beat box
 reggae style,
 Shoplifting back then was heavy duty,
 Doin' pieces [art] on a train the next day to admire
 their beauty,
 True, those days were the days ya, we had so much fun,
 We got through Homerton and the reminiscing was done.

This song shows rap's ability to incorporate Jamaican
 and black street influences through language use. Words
 like bray [brother], dett [detrimental/great] and dark
 [good or bad depending on the context] are street slang
 that are predominantly, but, as Task Force illustrates, not
 exclusively, used by black youth. From a lyrical stand

point, the music also shows the humor and critique that characterize the content and message. Here, they make fun of some of contemporary rap culture's fascination with being players when they state that they would "rather be a graffer than a player." This critiques some of commercial rap's use of the player cliché heard in rap records and seen in music videos. At the same time, by talking about being graffers they tie themselves to a wider understanding of hip hop culture, which includes the element of graffiti. In fact, the two rappers in the group still do graffiti. They also pay respect to their rap roots by talking about what type of music they listened to when they were young. As discussed earlier, London Posse's ragga hip hop, referred to in the song as "the beat box reggae style", is seen as an influence in their music.

Like Roots Manuva, Task Force is heavily influenced by black street culture, especially in the area of music. At the same time, Task Force's narrative in this song takes the listener on a trip through North and East London where they live. Sites such as Hackney, Clapton, and Homerton are areas that border their own North London neighborhood. Similar to what Taipanik from Blak Twang talks about on *Homegrown* in a later section, these rappers are intent on

locating their experiences and what they rap about squarely in their local area and communicating this in their own specialized British dialect.

2. Traditional British Rappers

The traditional British style uses a standard British accent that reflects what part of London the mc comes from. This is seen in the works of artists such as Supa T, Braintax and Blade. After ten years of releasing music, Blade is one of the most enduring British rappers and therefore serves as a good example of the traditional British style of rap. On *We'll Survive* Blade chronicles some of his feelings about being a rapper in the UK. This song refers to the ability of UK rap and UK rappers to endure despite the tenuous, sporadic commercial support for their music. In both rap styles, the idea that mcs do not want to achieve mass appeal, as well as rapping about the difficulty of being a mc in the UK, comes through in the lyrics. He raps,

Never made it, it would be a miracle
Not because we ain't capable, but simply we're too
scientific
Besides that, if it's too street nobody buys it
But you know where our hearts at
It's hard to change a man with principles
But what started in 1981 still continues
In 1999 we're strong, if not stronger

I've been surviving for long if not longer
We had a world of walls to get this far
But all I wanted is records
I never wanted to be a star.

This style does not actively show the influence of reggae or black street culture, but represents an alternative definition of what British rap sounds like. This does not mean it is in opposition to the Afro British style, but rather in unison with it, illustrating that not all youth directly incorporate the Jamaican cultural influence in London. For the most part these rappers reflect cultural influences that are British in origin. In this sense, the style these rappers use reveals much in terms of where the rapper grew up, among whom, and with whom they choose to identify. Many of these rappers have grown up in the outskirts of London, some distance from inner city areas. Like the Afro-British style, their style is not racially exclusive as blacks also practice this style. This approach to making rap music, while not overtly denying the strong influence of West Indian based styles, suggests that current and future generations are becoming increasingly distant--geographically, temporally and culturally--from the West Indian influence.

D. The English Only Movement

An issue confronting the underground is the cultural imperialism of US rap in relation UK rap. Throughout my research, informants expressed contempt for UK rappers who rapped in American accents and are inconsistent in their support of UK rap. An informant sarcastically called these people Fake Yanks and N.Y.L.O.N.S. (New York Londoners). While watching a freestyle competition where a sixteen year old British youth impressed the crowd with his lyrical skills, the same informant told me that he feels "Americanisms" are slowly fading as youth learn to rap with a British accent about subject matter that is indigenous to London.

One can conclude that the perceived lack of support for UK music has been due to a narrow understanding of hip hop as an American art form, capable of only a narrow range of subject matter. For example, in an article concerning the 20th year anniversary of US hip hop, the British newspaper The Guardian interpreted rap as an expression of African American poverty, crime and various other pathologies. The writer stated,

The black experience in America is totally different to Britain. The ghettos, the murder rate, the history of slavery, it's more intense. That's what feeds rap. British rappers are drawing on a much smaller pool of experience and fans want the real deal (March 19, 1999).

The lack of support for British "homegrown" rap came up regularly. Rapper Taipanik of Blak Twang took this up in the song *The Homegrown*. He raps,

Save the bologna for Don Collioni cau [cause]
 I love money, but I ain't comin' out phony
 You know me, the homegrown terrier from London area
 No bullshit, I don't need no fan club, its useless,
 Bredrin' [friend/brother] don't make excuses
 Start usin' your creative juices instead of watchin'
 all them bloody movies
 I keep it relevant within the realms and parameters of
 my lifestyle, wild style
 Expose strobe light life size raps on cats, blue foot
 [white] acts, creepin' in crevices and cracks,
 regurgitating scraps
 They're seven years late in fact.

An example of the fascination with US rap among black Britons at the expense of developing a black British identity is seen among those who affiliate themselves with mainstream US rap. I call this audience mainstreamers because of this link. This group follows the commercial rap music played on DJ Tim Westwood's Radio 1 Rap Show. Although ranging in class position, most mainstreamers that I encountered were black working class youth. I first encountered this group en mass during the 1998 Notting Hill Carnival. Westwood played a combination of US rap songs to a predominantly black crowd of approximately 2000 people. On stage were male and female dancers who were dressed in revealing clothing, exhibiting choreographed dance moves

familiar from US rap videos. The majority of the crowd mimicked the dancers' actions while they enthusiastically yelled their appreciation.

Primarily consumers of rap music, mainstreamers are not interested in the expressive side of rap. As British rap enthusiasts they nevertheless emulate the main hip hop trends, fashion, and music from the US. They follow the personas that have come to dominate the public's imagination of rap. For example, the thug [outlaw], the player [womanizer], the baller [wealthy/successful person] and the hoochie [female sex object]--characterizations that have become common in mainstream rap music in America--were apparent in segments of the mainstreamer community in London. Characterizations made ubiquitous by US rappers Jay Z, DMX, and Lil' Kim, echoed in this group's dress, speech, and dance.

These actions separate this community of rap enthusiasts from blacks who subscribe to rap's wider cultural aspects. As one informant put it,

They (mainstreamers) are not into the UK stuff and they are not as proud of their music and know what kind of influence that they could get from their music. Instead they are building on Queensbridge [a part of Queens, New York that has birthed several well known current rappers]. These younger people have opportunities. These kids are influenced by trends. They are cable babies. We had that foundation of

actually going to the jams at the Brixton Academy 7-8 years ago. We had the opportunity to see the tours. Biz, Shante [famous US rappers]. We went to the Fridge [London hip hop club in the 1980s]. We had local gigs all around the area. Tabernacle, the Albany. Now the only concerts these youths go to are Mase and Puff, Wu Tang [US rappers]. A lot of their success is based on image. Wu Wear [Clothing line brought out by this group] is almost more important than Wu Tang. That's the foundation that these kids have.

Many of my informants remarked that the lack of mainstream support for UK rap was part of a wider lack of confidence in the abilities of some British rappers and fans to effectively represent hip hop which they felt was an American genre and culture. This situation is further complicated by the fact British identity continues to be under scrutiny. In this instance, issues such as the changing racial makeup of Britain's urban centers, discussions around devolution and entrance into the European Union, the potential loss of the pound as Britain's sole currency in favor of the euro has called the demographic, geographic, and cultural character of Britain into question. In turn, if an English identity cannot be defined, how will it be reflected in rap music where representation and identity are of tantamount importance?

For the underground rap population, the idea of reflecting an English identity through accent and content is critical. This is at issue for both blacks and whites,

but seems more salient for blacks, as the category of black British has the added layer of race to complicate the creation of identity. As one black informant stated,

It's down to an identity crisis. It's not to compare the UK to the US because the US are deep within their infrastructure. I mean 6-700 years. At the most, blacks have been here for 100 years, and as a black force. In a way as being a force to reckon with in British society it's only been for 100 years and getting certain opportunities. As far as identity goes, we haven't actually established this proper black British culture. Even though we have a British hip hop sound, people are not embracing it enough. That's the problem. That's the identity thing. You are not proud of it enough.

The lack of ease with UK rap can possibly be attributed to groups that have not found a coherent "voice" which parallels much of what is happening with British identity in general.

Section III. Multiculture in Underground Rap

This section examines the topic of race and class contact in the London rap community. Both working class black and white groups participate in London's underground rap community. However, the wider rap community is experiencing a split along racial and class lines. In this respect, the fan base of the community is divided into two groups--those who patronize events associated more with black people such as Flavor of the Month at Subterranea

(called Sub) and Mudlumz and those that patronize events that are associated with whites such as Scratch at La Scala. Rap artists perform in both spaces but are found socially at the predominantly black venues. I refer to the two clusters as "group one" and "group two".

A. Group One

Group one is a multi-cultural group comprised of people of West Indian, African, and European descent all from working class backgrounds. The bulk of the study took place with this group and included participant observation at Subterranea in Ladbrooke Grove and Mudlumz in North London.

Mudlumz is a monthly event that is organized by white reality rapper Steven, white independent rapper Charles, Asian reality rapper Joe, who will be discussed later and a multi-racial group of their associates. It attracts people mainly from North London and surrounding areas. The majority of its attendees are working class males between the ages of 18-25 from varied racial backgrounds. The venue costs £10 [\$16] to enter. Mudlumz is put on by a collective of individuals called the M.U.D. Family [M.U.D. Fam]. Events organized by people associated with the M.U.D. Fam

have the reputation of attracting a working class "thug" [outlaw] element. The music played at the event is both commercial and underground from the US with a representation of UK artists. The UK artists are, of course, those who have released music. This is one of the few public settings where my informants "tolerated" commercial rap music. Each Mudlumz event ended with an open mic session. Reflecting a gendered division of labor, women in attendance were in a spectator role or took money for entry at the door. The women who collected money were the partners of the members of the M.U.D. Family. One exception to this was the performance of a female rapper called Phoebe 1. Her music can be described as UK popular rap with catchy choruses and backing vocals. She did receive a degree of support from the crowd. Mudlumz was a key event to attend because my informants could be regularly found there. In addition, it was a means by which to meet my informants in a non-interview setting.

Mudlumz relies on a series of low cost marketing tools such as flyers, posters, stickers and radio commercials played on pirate radio stations to publicize their events. The posters can be seen in North London in places like Highbury/Islington and Finsbury Park and in areas as far

south as Brixton. A "street team"¹¹ puts up stickers and posters in noticeable places throughout the city such as on the tube [underground train system], in tube stations, on street signs, and any other visible public space.

The crowd at Mudlumz mirrors the organizing group's multi-racial composition. Called the M.U.D. Fam, this is a group of people who come together to put on hip hop events and socialize. Most of them have been friends for a number of years and see themselves as closer than friends, hence the metaphor of family. Like much of inner city working class London, there is a great deal of mixture among racial groups. Regardless of their racial or cultural backgrounds, the members of the M.U.D. Family show cultural attributes that are associated with black youth. Informants Charles, Steven and Joe are central members of the M.U.D. Fam.

The idea of race is negotiated with few problems in the public arena in rap. Within this research population, it was routine to see people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds rapping together. However, whites who rapped with blacks were said to be seen as a particular type of white person, one who could "flow" with blacks and had been brought up with a significant amount of black

¹¹ The street team is a group whose job is to publicize

cultural influence. These whites also saw themselves as separate from other whites in the middle class hip hop community.

B. Group Two

Group two, the other rap community, is comprised of people of European descent from middle class backgrounds. It does not, for the most part, interact with the working class group, attending different rap events and patronizing different rap related retail outlets. For example, Deal Real and Mr. Bongo are two specialty rap record shops in Central London's West End. These shops carry primarily independently released rap music from both the UK and US. During my research, Deal Real served as the place for freestyle sessions as well as the backdrop for several documentaries on rap in London. Of the two shops, my informants considered Deal Real more of a "hip hop" record shop because this is where more working class people came to buy their music. In contrast, Mr. Bongo was seen as being for middle class people pretending to like hip hop, but who had only just discovered it.

The main venue for group two is Scratch. It

events to those at the grass roots hip hop level.

specializes in nostalgic and non-commercial UK and US rap. The club features artists from the UK such as Task Force, Mark B, Kela and DJ Vadim. The promoters also bring over artists from the US who are yet to break into the mainstream commercial rap market. US Artists like Jurassic 5, Dilated People's, The Arsonists, Souls of Mischief, and The Pharcyde have played here. Scratch fills an interesting niche in London hip hop because it caters to a mainly white middle class audience.

Scratch's clientele respond favorably to hearing the nostalgic rap records of the 1970s and 1980s from artists such as Sugarhill Gang, Funky Four Plus One and the Treacherous Three. This crowd also dresses with nostalgia, wearing clothes and styles from hip hop's initial stages like shell-toed Addidas and track suits [warm up suits]. In the opinion of some, they are attempting to re-create old school¹² hip hop as they try to re-claim the period.

Because group two has better access to goods and resources, they are able to organize public events in larger venues with more regularity. My black informants felt that group two were being hailed as the

¹² The term "old school" refers to the period from the 1970s to the mid 1980s that was hip hop's initial period of popularity. It is seen by some as a period when the music

representatives of hip hop in London. They felt that non-black artists such as DJ Vadim, Mark B and Blade have come to be representative of UK hip hop in the media. Finally, the predominantly white attendance at events such as UK Fresh, which is a yearly showcase of UK hip hop, shows that it could be assumed that rap music and hip hop culture are currently viewed as white and in some cases middle class art forms rather than urban art forms as they were originally.

The racial and class divide in rap is not discussed openly by members of the rap community, but it is acknowledged outside of the public gaze. A black informant told me of his plan to create and circulate a document in the form of a newsletter among members of both communities in an attempt to facilitate a discussion of the issues. The plan was never realized, however.

The informants in group one were highly critical of the crowd and idea behind Scratch. Indeed, they saw themselves as opposed to group two in terms of the different ways that each participated in hip hop. In this instance, the main distinctions between the rap communities were race and secondarily class. An informant in group one

was "authentic".

referred to the patrons of the middle class events derogatorily as "students and homosexuals." This brought notions of class and sexuality to the fore. In his view, being a student was a marker of class distinction and he conflates this with being gay. This is not the way that all the members of group one referred to others. In fact, despite the divisions, informants from both my research populations have performed or hosted events at Scratch. In this instance, economics and the opportunity to make money were more important than authenticity, class and race. Interestingly, the informants from group one seemed to appreciate the acts that performed at Scratch but expressed disdain towards the crowd and the idea of a hip hop club that did not advertise to a hip hop--read black--crowd.

C. Exclusion

A final, but important issue that will be discussed is the topic of exclusion in the rap community. My research revealed that many blacks feel displaced from rap music despite the perceived unity found in certain parts of the wider hip hop community. They felt that whites are now in economic and cultural control of rap music. For example, one informant told me that white promoters controlled who

got jobs and in turn this dictated who is publicly seen as representing rap in London. He said,

They were hiring particular mcs and artists that could bring that vibe like the Scratch Perverts [a white dee jay crew based in London]. Those dee jays keep everything in house. What I was beginning to see was that the same people were getting called. They weren't paying Shortee [a black dee jay]. The best hip hop crews are black. Any white crews with talent they'll push that.

According to a black informant who was involved in the multicultural rap community, his networking abilities could only get him so far. He said that he was at a disadvantage in terms of producing records and furthering projects in print media because those with capital in the rap and wider hip hop community were white. His critique of whites' involvement tells us something about debates concerning race in the UK more generally. Muted and non-confrontational, such critiques took place only in homes and around other blacks. These counter-narratives focused on how to include whites and other groups in what the black rappers felt was on some level a black cultural form while still maintaining a black presence. The participation of whites was not at issue; it was *how* whites and others participated--*what* roles they occupied which would in turn dictate how rap was represented. Although this was a point of contention for many blacks in the study, it was not

openly discussed.

Conclusion

Racial discrimination disproportionately affects black working class youth. This undermines their access to venues, distribution of music, signing of record contracts, and access to mainstream radio airplay. Is this tolerated due to the lack of public discourse about race?

Interestingly, this lack of public discourse and language available to talk about race and racism is also experienced outside of the rap community. This makes it difficult to recognize the salience of race and reflects the muted public acknowledgment and debate about race related issues. In discussing their experiences of growing up around whites, blacks stress the congeniality between races on the micro level. Their comments on the way that people of different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds interact raise questions about precisely how issues of race and class affect people on the local level.

In an article called *Gifted, Black and Gone* black British and Asian academics examine why so many of their group are moving to academic positions in the United States. Many of them dealt with the study of black and

Asian issues in their research. In the UK, they found race related concerns are seen as a marginal research agenda. In the words of one professor,

There is no critical capacity to talk about race issues here; we have no such intellectual tradition. We talk in very regressive ways; 19th century ideas about genes and blood are at the heart of a lot of 'commonsense' thinking, which is not challenged in schools (May 30, 2000).

At one point in my research, an informant told me that when black people discuss race, whites and even some blacks see this as a radical stance. Here, radical is not taken as a formal political perspective but as one that is somehow too outspoken, suggesting that one is out of touch with the class-based reality of UK society. Because Britain is thought of as a place where class stratification forms the primary area of social inequality, issues of race are slow to come to the fore. In turn, blacks have had difficulty in firmly placing the discussion of race and racism on the popular agenda. Here, I am not suggesting that blacks in the UK are politically docile, but I do think that a public dialogue that addresses race would benefit both blacks and whites and also lead to a more useful examination of the relationship between rap, race and class. This lack of public discourse around race in the UK leaves blacks

without a forum to talk about the institutionalized aspects of racism and its affects on popular culture.

Black rappers' critiques of white involvement in rap mirrored the debates concerning race in the UK more generally. As noted above, their critiques were muted and less confrontational, taking place in homes and around other blacks. This served as a counter-narrative to popular discussions of race as a non factor in the lives of black Britain and on-going celebrations of the multicultural nature of London's cultural life. The question should then be asked, what are the ramifications for blacks in terms of identity and participation in popular culture, given that racial as well as class divisions remain?

As mentioned earlier, the limits of viewing rap as a leveler should be acknowledged. Race and class were issues that created schisms about who had the "right" to participate in rap's creation and practice. In the multi-racial rap community the public discussion of rap by blacks and whites viewed it as a "street" thing. The street became a metaphor for an urban existence. In this sense, public narratives of the contemporary practice of rap becomes that of a multicultural working class based movement. In the words of David, a black informant,

Unlike the US or South Africa, segregation [in England] is different. There aren't many black areas. It [hip hop] will always be about urban and race. Its not just blacks that are living there. It's black and Mediterranean, Vietnamese, whites living in the same community and experiencing the same things. These youths go to school together and live in the same estates. So it's about the inner city.

However, when I later asked David about the role of black people in rap he said that "they are the true leaders." In other words, although David acknowledges the multicultural practice of rap, at the same time he stresses the role of race in its creation. In one respect, as a black rapper he feels a sense of ownership, but at the same time he finds this hard to maintain because there are not a plethora of what he called "black areas" in the cultural and geographical landscape. In terms of maintaining a black presence in popular culture he tellingly said that

Personally, I don't think that we [blacks] see anything as ours. At one time drum and bass and jungle [indigenous black musics] were seen as the only black British music. But blacks are not pioneering that anymore.

The link between racial identity and cultural practices is constructed by both black and white participants in rap. It is also imposed on them through larger legacies that create a link between expressive cultures and the race, class and nationality. Thus rap is a cultural form that everyone can participate in, but one

that finds a sense of legitimacy through the participation of blacks.

Some of the artists are aware of the racial split that comes out of this and is apparent in the community. In the words of one, the division is

Almost frightening. Scratch is white, Sub (Subterranea) is black. It's almost frightening for a black crowd. Because traditionally white people tend to properly support things. We need to stop dividing the community.

This quote is interesting considering the way that rap and hip hop have diverged with respect to both race and class since their inception. The informant is alarmed about the split for two reasons. On the one hand, there is his concern for the control of rap. In saying that "traditionally white people tend to properly support things" he is suggesting that with this support comes greater influence, which he feels should be alarming to blacks. On the one hand, the informant calls for racial unity in the community as he feels that rap is the domain of all groups. This is at odds with his conviction that rap should maintain a core of black supporters.

At stake is the paradox that blacks seem to be caught in: how to define "black" culture while practicing it in an inclusive way in London's multicultural setting. In

contrast to what advocates of multiculturalism depict as London's racially relaxed appearance, some black rap artists dispute the increased presence of whites in rap.

There seems to be a particular type of multiculturalism in place in London that provides a perception of social integration and amicability while failing to represent or talk about the experiences of people of African descent. Poor black and white people have a degree of common experiences that contribute to a bridge in understanding and the identification of analogous conditions in terms of unemployment, access to schools, low income levels and cultural references. I stress analogous because black people in the UK also experience racism and racially based attacks, and continue to have higher rates of school exclusion and unemployment.

Class solidarity can be a way for poor blacks and whites to form alliances, but the way that race affects the plight of black Britons needs to be further acknowledged when discussing relations in the inner city. This should not obscure the fact that most members of the rap community interact in many ways as members of a wider universe. Here, membership is based on the ability to represent one's own working class background, experience, and skill level

through rap music and lyrics. In addition, it is also valued, within the community where the informants exist, to perform with an English accent and discuss issues related to English experience, regardless of race. This ability to transcend racial lines applies to working class youth in general. Popular culture has been a space of inter-racial contact even though there are points within the rap community that illustrate divergence along race and class lines. Critically, however, these points of divergence need to be mapped and discussed rather than prescriptively asserting that amicable relations are in place in the community. The remaining chapters undertake this task.

CHAPTER FOUR

BLACKS in LONDON RAP

Introduction

In this study, blacks involved in rap in London develop racial and cultural identities out of recreation and necessity. Other groups such as working class whites sometimes adopt a similar position, as many of them are subject to an analogous pattern of class based discrimination. However, for blacks both race and class influence interactions in the context of rap and the wider society. In turn, blacks remain at the vanguard of racial, class and cultural marginalization in British society. This chapter looks at what is at stake in terms of race and class for blacks who practice rap. A central theme is the paradox of race experienced by black people which became apparent to me through debates about participation in rap. The paradox for blacks involved negotiating close and prolonged contact with whites while developing a cultural product that is intimately associated with black British experiences.

Section I. Contemporary Blackness

This section serves as a brief examination of the study of black British culture. Contemporary examinations of black British culture focus on the influences that shape it and the fluid way that it is made. Diasporic influences are highlighted, yet because of the racial and class dynamic found in the UK, especially in London, the idea of cultural mixture and hybridity between varied racial groups is also discussed. The significant debates lie in the salience of differentiation of blacks' social, cultural and national background in defining who and what makes up black British culture.

A. Black British Culture

Alexander (1996) examines the creation and formation of black British identities through everyday lived experiences. Her ethnographic depiction of a male-dominated peer group portrays blacks as a differentiated group who are involved in the on-going project of identity creation and re-creation. Unfortunately, her research is an anomaly among anthropological studies. As she states, this is partly due to issues concerning access and acceptance in this research population. Contemporary conditions present

an opportunity for anthropologists to pursue issues surrounding the relation between race, class and culture in the UK. Through the presentation of ethnographic data, anthropology offers a unique perspective concerning the process of racial and cultural formations.

Cultural studies dominates examinations of black British culture. In general, cultural studies scholars performed a much needed task by introducing topics and issues that were related to black people in the UK during the late 1970s and 1980s. As representatives of the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), their examination of everyday forms of cultural practices gave precedence to the activities of working class groups (Hall 1980; 1978). This bottom up approach, reminiscent of the work of E.P. Thompson, would spawn a series of studies of working class groups, especially white youth subcultures and popular culture. An outgrowth of this was to focus attention on the cultural politics and culture of Britain's black population (see Baker, Diawara and Londeborg 1996).

Cultural studies allowed British scholars to talk about the postcolonial relations that characterize interactions between immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia and whites in the UK. In this context, black

identity becomes a work of forging identity and culture in the face of a racially and culturally de-centered Britain. Gone now were the totalizing narratives of British identity and Britishness. In the view of these scholars, immigrants alongside whites developed ideas about what is British. Coupled with this is the reality that globalization, dispersal and movement are redrawing the lines of communication and travel between black groups while complicating the idea of what blackness entails. Hall (1989; 1988) critiques ideas of racial essentialism in the UK. No longer could blacks be thought of as a single racialized identity.

A related point is the eventual critique of race as a concept. Although writing about the United States, the work of Anthony Appiah (1992) is related to this line of reasoning about race. He asserts that racial categories are not indicators of race even though they have been used in this way, further adding to the "illusion of race." This dissertation, however, acknowledges the processes whereby racial and cultural categories are constantly imposed from outside onto the bodies and into the minds of black people (Fanon 1967), while simultaneously being formed by black people. To ignore the reality that is created through the

social construction of race is equally as problematic as accepting an essentialized idea of race. Such a reading of race ultimately leads us to discuss the construction of racial categories without an examination of the processes that have led to the creation of these identities, as well as their political and cultural legacies. The question that this dissertation asks is how is difference treated by blacks in the "new" multicultural contexts. I will return to this point later in the chapter.

B. The "Formative" Years - The 1970s and 1980s

During the 1970s and 1980s the cultural focus and impetus of many black Britons was slowly shifting away from allegiances and symbols from Jamaica that were tied to reggae through Rastafarianism to incorporate wider diasporic influences. If the 1970s was characterized by chants of "down with Babylon"--which encapsulated black British cultural and political oppression--the 1980s brought the realization that black people were in the belly of the beast and needed to turn their attention to their immediate surroundings in the UK's major urban complexes.

In 1981 Brixton, south London witnessed an uprising in which youth revolted against an increased police presence

and unfair treatment termed "saturation policing". Police relations with blacks were already strained by the public panic around muggings as young blacks were portrayed as criminals by the media in the 1970s. Hall (1978) recognized the "hysteria" around muggings as part of a much larger ideological assault by the media and politicians that established young blacks as a criminal element. The rebellious actions by blacks in Brixton alarmed much of mainstream Britain as images of insurrection made blacks appear lawless and consequently further outside of the national identity. In addition, 1981 saw the firebombing of a black person's home during a party which killed 11 people in New Cross, in southeast London. This event garnered no major inquiries or convictions by the British authorities. Public outcry was channeled into the organization of a Black People's Day of Action which marched from southeast London to the well-known free speech area of Hyde Park called Speaker's Corner. This march brought matters of race to the attention of the national audience. During this time, racial difference was naturalized into "commonsense" cultural incompatibility. Racist practices became consolidated on several levels (housing, education and employment) to form hegemonic views of race and

marginalized positions for blacks.

Interestingly, in this period the political discourse also became more complex as evident in the establishment of women's political organizations in the late 1970s and early 1980s such as Southall Black Sisters and the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD). These groups diversified the dialogue concerning identity and politics by inserting gender along with race and class into a political strategy. The mobilization of women of different racial and ethnic groups facilitated a new look at political strategies and goals.

During this time, artists also began to form organizations such as the Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa. These groups visualized and represented the generation of black Britons that had been born in England. The area of representation took on an added significance as racist images in the media were being used to normalize and justify discrimination. Musical groups such as Soul II Soul began to define a new black British musical and visual aesthetic through the use of diasporic musical influences such as hip hop, reggae and soul that would carry into the 1990s.

In the 1980s, the popularity of American soul music

and rap and hip hop culture became evident. In his discussion of sound system culture in South London Les Back put it this way,

Some sound systems have been passed on to a younger generation which is more interested in hip hop, rap, scratch and rare groove, and three step soul (which hail not from the slums of Kingston, but the streets of New York) than Rub a Dub and Sleng Teng [a synthesized reggae rhythm] (Back 1988:146).

This movement between reggae and American influenced popular culture was represented in film by one of Britain's best known black film makers, Issac Julien, in his early 1990s release *Young Soul Rebels*. Here, characters show how American soul music of the 1970s provided a backdrop for illegal pirate radio and expressive culture more generally in London. Julien captures the tensions and contradictions between generations of black Britons that were "raised" on reggae music and culture and a generation that was more interested in soul music and American culture.

Blacks in Britain recognized analogous conditions around histories related to economic disenfranchisement and racial marginalization due to similar racially based practices and discourse found in both the UK and the US. Essentially, people of African descent in England viewed rap music and hip hop culture as means to address

similarities in race based discrimination and economic discrimination. As Paul Willis states,

While many young people use music to situate themselves, historically and politically, through creative work with its symbolic forms and meanings, for young black people this process is especially important. Black youth have consistently found and made a political and cultural resonance in the themes and discourses of musical traditions which have their origins outside Britain, in Jamaican reggae and black American soul music, for example. What black musical forms such as reggae and hip hop make available are symbolic resources for the oppositional understanding and grounded aesthetic quickening of the otherwise wholly negative experiences of powerlessness and racial domination (Willis 1990:70).

Hip hop culture and rap music offered an alternative way for black Britain to identify. Members of the rap community in London could express solidarity with others who created and developed rap throughout the diaspora, despite the fact that these groups did not reside in close geographical proximity to each other. It is in this historical and social context that rap became a viable cultural form that blacks in London began to create and practice. Since its inception, hip hop culture has maintained a constant presence in the cultural vocabulary of primarily black Britain as well as other disenfranchised populations found in the midst of white and Asian communities.

A black informant remarked that the transition from

reggae to rap was relatively smooth for black Britons as it included some of the same musical elements. Beyond the vocal similarities between reggae and rap, blacks in Britain were able to use and relate to the rap medium because of comparable uses of lyricism and performance. In reference to this an informant stated,

Man [people] in the reggae scene said look a minute...man is holding the mic [microphone] like we do in a dance and calling it rappin'. We call it chattin'. Compare beats and rhythms. Hold on a minute...lyrics, battling, raising a crowd, flowing, it's the same. Dancehall was the same as a hip hop jam.

Tricia Rose stresses the diasporic nature of hip hop culture in stating that

Hip hop is an Afro-diasporic cultural form which attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity and community. It is the tension between the cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of Black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip hop (Rose 1994b:71).

By situating hip hop in relation to wider issues of economics and politics it is easy to see why and how primarily young working class blacks and other disenfranchised groups developed an affinity for it during the early years of Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal Britain.

In the 1970s and 1980s, hip hop's diasporic characterizations were already present in the US, evident in the link between reggae and Jamaican culture, and in hip hop's initial creation and development in the South Bronx. One of the early pioneers of US hip hop, Kool Herc, was a native of Kingston, Jamaica who moved to the Bronx, bringing with him the sound system concept that was ubiquitous in reggae at that time. Herc began by playing reggae at house parties. In addition, he integrated short spoken lyrics with the music he played in order to excite the crowd. The "chatting" and "toasting" with lyrics was a direct borrowing of the style and presentation of reggae music and culture that Jamaicans previously borrowed from American radio dee jays of the 1960s. Concerning this evolution, hip hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa remarked,

He [Herc] knew that a lot of American blacks were not getting into the reggae of his country. He took the same thing that they were doing - toasting - and did it with American records, Latin or records with beats (Toop 1984:69).

This would become one of the foundations of early hip hop music in the US.

In the UK, a different racial and class dynamic was in place. The presence of whites has been an issue since the early days of hip hop in London. A black informant

described this time as follows,

The way Bam [Afrika Bambaataa] expressed the culture it was more like it was a brotherhood type of thing. So no one had any animosity to the white kids until they became such a large element in the hip hop community. Then black kids felt like these guys were taking over. You would go to the big jams and you'd see white kids getting harassed by black kids at the concerts like P E [Public Enemy]¹ and the Beasties [Beastie Boys]². It was like you can come out, but you have to know your place.

Ironically, Public Enemy had a strong pro-black empowerment theme in relation to whites and this was echoed in their music. Apparently, whites showed a strong interest and support for this group despite their pro-black stance. An informant remarked that, "a lot of fans [of rap] over here are white. If you went to a P E concert over here, the minority were black." As mentioned above, however, at this time in rap, white kids had to "know their place" within rap regardless of the race of the performers.

It was not uncommon for my black informants to bring up the racial element of hip hop that was in place during this period. Simply put, they noted the ethnic and racial identity of the main groups of hip hoppers in the US--

¹ Public Enemy (PE) were a pro-black politically orientated rap group popular in the late 1980s to mid 1990s.

² The Beastie Boys (Beasties) were one of the first commercially successful white rap groups that began in the mid 1980s.

blacks and Latinos--and made a connection based on similar social conditions. This was clear when a black informant told me,

Even though we saw Puerto Ricans in the videos it [hip hop] was expressed as an ethnic thing. It was like something that ethnic minorities who had been undermined could express how they felt. How they were trapped in ghettos, pushed to the bottom of certain things. How they lived and telling the masses of things. During those times black people felt like hip hop was theirs. For us, whites had pop music and other musics to express how they felt. We didn't have anything. We had soul, but we couldn't get it out to wider masses (pause) some of this wasn't reaching the young kids.

In the 1980s, the public representation of rap and hip hop was black. For the period March 1985 to July 1989, I analyzed 500 columns of print from Tim Westwood's Hip Hop Column published in the UK music magazine *Blues and Soul*. This column featured articles about artists, lists of events, competitions and that readers could enter to win prizes. The column also featured pictures taken at various events of rappers, dancers, dee jays and graffiti artists. During the period, the overwhelming majority of rappers in this publication were black. This included rappers from both the UK and US. In addition, I conducted a similar examination of Britain's main rap magazine *Hip Hop Connection* beginning in May 1989. Again, most of the featured artists from the UK and US were black. However,

since 1995 I estimate that the number of white rappers featured has increased to approximately 40-50 percent.

In addition, *Bad Meaning Good*, the documentary that introduced much of Britain to hip hop, featured all black performers and visual artists. The documentary showed the rap group London Posse rapping in the back of a car and on stage. It also showed a piece (work) by the graffiti artist, Prime, with an explanation of graffiti art and his views on London Transport's anti-graffiti tactics. A dee jay called DJ Fingers from Sindicut, a popular crew of the time, was shown at his home "cutting up"³ *Its not Unusual* by Tom Jones and explaining the art of dee jaying. The hip hop jams in the documentary were tightly packed, taking place in small venues that looked like community centers. The only white person present in the documentary was DJ Tim Westwood who was shown at a pirate radio station playing hip hop records. Black radio television and radio presenter Trevor Nelson was also briefly featured in the documentary.

This documentary, as well as other video footage that I obtained of jams, magazines, and interviews demonstrated

³ "Cutting up" involves having two turntables with copies of the same record on each turntable being played at the same time. By moving the fader from left to right, the dee jay is able to play the sound of either turntable through the speakers while being able to listen to the other turntable

the strong black presence in hip hop, especially rap, before the 1990s. The imagery that was in place during this period was distinctly influenced by US rap. The dances, such as the wap, were the same as those that were popular during the time in the US. Other hip hop staples like Kangol hats, Gazelle glasses, thick gold chains, and performers dressed in matching track suits (athletic wear) were present in full display. The link between black London and the US, primarily black New York, was clear in the music, dress and speech of London rap.

C. The Present

The practice of rap has become more nuanced since the mid 1980s and into the present. Reflecting more of rap's wider global appeal and movement it has diversified in terms of racial and class characteristics thus bringing various groups together while at the same highlighting issues of participation, authenticity and control. In the 1990s, blacks came into their own in the cultural sense when indigenous black musics like jungle was created.

Rap continued to have a particular meaning to blacks in my study despite these new musical and cultural forms.

through headphones that are connected to a mixer.

However, my black informants were unwilling or unable to claim rap as their own except in private. In turn, smaller rap functions developed to cater to a black rap crowd and an urban constituency. In the mid 1990s, DJ 279 put on events such as Flavor of the Month at a venue called The Borderline. This was an example of a non-mainstream rap event that the black community in London attended. Although whites were also present, the event occupied a space where underground rap was practiced through open mics and performances--one of few spaces or forums where blacks could rap in public. This event was seen as an "authentic" rap function because it brought professional and amateur performers together. Part of this authenticity was also due to the fact that black urban youth were involved in the rapping. In other words, the participants conflated ideas of non-mainstream or underground with black and urban culture to define an authentic rap event. Participation in this type of event was a way for blacks to practice rap in a public, yet intimate, setting. Here, blacks and whites who had been previously exposed to rap could participate in hip hop by rapping, listening to music and dialoguing. As mentioned earlier, this was not claimed as a solely black space as select whites entered and participated.

British film director Isaac Julien explored the influence of rap and reggae on black identity in the UK and US in his documentary entitled *The Darker Side of Black*.

About black involvement in rap in the UK he stated,

Rap music has not the same importance in Britain as it has in America, except for the black diasporan communities in Britain and the Caribbean, where it has great influence especially in younger audiences. With regard to representations of black identities the homeboy image plays a transnational role to mythic dimensions in black youth culture (Julien 1995:2).

While the "homeboy" image is not prevalent among all blacks involved in rap, the quote does speak to the importance of rap in the lives of many black working class youth. According to Julien and my own research, rap's practice and imagery fill a role for black youth in the UK. Given the absence of other outlets, the cultural realm represents an important area of access, and the way that rap conflates ideas of racial, class, and cultural identity, self representation and masculinity make it appealing to black male youth in particular.

Although the rap community shows racial and class diversity, I was interested in how blacks chose to portray a rap "lifestyle." It became apparent that to them, rap was more than recreation. Recreation is not irrelevant of course, but beyond this, blacks emphasized the way that rap

allows people to represent themselves, communicate and create culture out of environments similar to those that rap grew out of in the US.

Section II. Black Britons in Rap

This next section serves as an overview of the rappers that I studied in my research. It is meant to demonstrate the various backgrounds of the rappers and address some of the practices that are involved in producing rap. In addition, the style in which the mcs rapped is also examined. My labels for categories of rappers are based on my observations of the topics they chose to address in the music and how they represented themselves through the music. These categories are not racially bound, but in this chapter I discuss the "black" reality and independent rappers. I discuss the white representatives of these categories in the next chapter.

A. Reality Rappers

As discussed in chapter one, reality rappers are concerned with social conditions in London, The group 12 Stone represent reality rappers that relate less to the culture of rap and more to its commercial side. An

informant who knows them called them "raggo" which is a slang term that means "rough". They have knowledge of what is happening in the London underground, but are equally likely to look to the US especially to East Coast rappers like Raekwon and Nas for lyrical and stylistic influences. In many ways, these reality rappers are black Britons' attempt to narrate their own experience of disenfranchisement in the same way that rappers do in the US.

Another characteristic of the reality rappers is that they emphasize and valorize profitability as well as lyrical ability. During my fieldwork, members openly talked about wanting to come to the US and "make it." They saw this as a realistic goal that would be achieved through hard work and well-written lyrics. They had a fascination with what they considered would be a "rap life" in the US. This included access to large amounts of money, expensive cars, women and being involved in an inner city environment. Significantly, these are images and scenarios that are played out in some US rap music and videos. In fact, after completion of their album, they planned to make a music video of their own. Eric, one of their younger associates with who they collaborate talked about battling,

or lyrically competing, with popular US rap groups. He told me that he knew the type of car he wanted to drive and that he wanted Hype Williams, a popular US rap music video director, to direct his music video.

The emphasis on the visual and material aspects of rap suggested that these reality rappers were involved in rap partially because they liked to rap but also to make a great deal of profit. The members of the group appeared to be less integrated with whites than are other blacks involved in the multiracial circles of rap. They displayed a pronounced street aesthetic as seen in their clothes or "garms": tight straight legged jeans, Reebok Classics or Nike shoes, sweatshirt or t-shirt caps and gold jewelry or a gold tooth if possible. This group as well as other blacks outside of the rap community appropriated designers like Moschino, Dolce and Gabana, and Versace as "ghetto chic." These labels were associated with glamour, style and status as the clothes are relatively expensive. Nike Air Max shoes can cost £120 [\$200] and Versace jeans can cost £70 [\$115]. Re-casting designers, young blacks appropriated high fashion for poor areas, showing that the poor could be as glamorous and operate along similar aesthetic limits as wealthy people. At the same time, this group re-

appropriated the designers and clothing articles by wearing them in "unconventional" ways such as wearing designer shirts and pants with athletic shoes and/or hats. Mobile phones were standard accessories and tools for business. I am, of course, describing the group that I studied. There are many styles of clothes worn by people who live in the same areas as my informants and I do not mean to suggest that this is a "ghetto uniform."

The group represents a basic "street mentality" and the contradictions that come out of this. Here, street is a metaphor for rough and tested. A mainstream audience or an audience that is not part of their neighborhood or social stratum would not find what the rappers rapped about as intelligent or progressive. Because of their precarious social and economic standing they feel their daily focus is on economic survival. Although, they have plans to improve their economic and social standing by "legitimate" means, they do not have the resources to do so. Due to their lack of educational and occupational qualifications, they participate in the underground economy. It is the idea of survival and what they feel is their reality that they rap about in their music.

In addition, their point of reference is Hackney,

their London neighborhood. They do not interact in intimate ways with people outside of it. Their uneasiness in mainstream society such as at social gatherings outside of Hackney is apparent. For example, I went with Carlton, one of the group, to East London to inquire about a rate for getting a vinyl record made. He lacked the verbal and communication skills needed to communicate with the business owner. Carlton seemed uneasy with discussing figures and rates as he struggled with words. The skills that he mastered in his own business activities were not valued in this context. He was able to negotiate with few problems in his local area in Hackney, but had difficulties in other surroundings. By using this example, I do not want to dichotomize "street" and "mainstream" communication skills. However, I do want to suggest that Carlton had different skills that were not valued in mainstream London.

Carlton's estate and its area in general had a noticeably higher black population than other parts of London. When we walked through the neighborhood, Carlton said hello to whites and Asians in passing, but his immediate group of friends were blacks of Jamaican extraction. The rappers were brought up with a high degree of Jamaican influence. This was reflected in their music in

terms of speech and accents, slang words, and subject matter. Their album, *Stone Age 2000*, has interludes and skits between songs that are laced with reggae, dub (heavy bass) beats and rhythms. Carlton had a close commitment to blackness that was seen in his choice of friends, girlfriends, and places where he socializes. He did not routinely attend functions that were predominantly white in attendance. I recognized that he had no interest in going to these functions and sometimes he did not know about their existence. For example, I would often ask him why he did not go out in the West End, which is multi-racial, even if predominantly white. He replied that he did not like those clubs, instead preferring to go to places in black areas like nearby Dalston or to rap jams that had a significant black crowd like Mudlumz. I never saw Carlton or his crew at predominantly white jams like Scratch. This was due to the racial and class composition of the club and its location outside of Hackney, as well as Carlton's sometimes unawareness of who was performing at the venue.

It was not that Carlton disliked whites. In fact, he expressed little animosity to them. It seemed as though he simply did not come into intimate contact with them nor seem comfortable with them in social settings on a regular

basis. During the time that I spent with him, the only whites I saw at his home were those who came to buy marijuana. Despite his and his group's close residential proximity to whites and Asians, he stressed that unlike many black men in the UK, he did not date white girls. This was a controversial topic as the group saw dating white girls as a threat to their ideas of what blacks should and should not do and as an affront to black culture and black women. At the same time, Carlton showed frustration when talking about black women going out with white men. According to him and other black informants this trend was increasing, "making it hard" for black males and females to unify on a cultural level.

Carlton and his friends had a particular kind of relationship with their neighborhood. The group constantly talked about it in conversation and in their music. Like US rap artists who rename their area in their music, for example Wu Tang Clan calling Staten Island "Shaolin", or Red Man renaming Newark as "Brick City", this group calls Hackney, "Crackney." Another informant who was not a reality rapper saw this as trying to be "too American", but the group felt that the name captured the drug selling in their area and it also gave Hackney the reputation of being

rough, a hard place in which to live. They believed that they lived in the ghetto and wanted to portray this in their music. During my time with them, they discussed the incidence of violence in Hackney as some of their friends had been stabbed, beaten up, robbed, and put in jail. As mentioned earlier, the Hackney rate of crimes against persons was almost three times that of the city and ethnic minorities were proportionally over-represented as victims (Hackney Crime and Disorder Audit 1998/1999).

Carlton and his group want their main occupation to be rapping. They released a compact disc that I acquired when I returned to London a year after my fieldwork. Each rapper was involved in some additional way to make money outside of rap. Like much of working class London, this supplemental income was in addition to collecting their dole check or "signing on." Carlton had a mainstream job several years ago. He worked for the London Underground for a year as a night security guard. Initially, he liked his job because he could take advantage of the situation or "take the piss." This meant that he could leave at night to do gigs and return with nobody missing him. He got Curtis, another reality rapper, a job there. Carlton later quit because of the night hours and his dislike of the work.

This was one of Curtis's few jobs as an adult. He left it after punching his supervisor because he did not like the way that the supervisor spoke to him.

This group saw rap music as a way to make money. Their strategy was to put what they earned through their various activities back into producing a compact disc. One of the most difficult steps was to get the initial capital to produce the compact disc and start their record label. They had different investment strategies, one of which was having someone underwrite their production costs. They had difficulty finding someone to do this.

Carlton did not finish secondary school and often complained about the schooling that he received. The borough of Hackney has a notorious reputation for poor schooling. At the time of my fieldwork there were attempts to privatize Hackney's school system to improve performance.

As discussed in the introduction, the reality rappers, like the others in the study, lacked qualifications. Work experience as well as educational requirements such as

GCSE's⁵ and A levels⁶, are the main qualifications that employers look for. Obviously, without these credentials people are at a serious disadvantage. The school that Carlton went to was somewhat dilapidated and when we walked past it he had little good to say about it. As he put it, "I kind of failed out."

Besides Curtis, each reality rapper was attempting to do some other type of work. Carlton was going to a technical school for sound production. Dwayne was awaiting a place at a technical school. Chris was enrolled in a video production course at a local college.

Their attitude to their music was that they were "bringing the real" which meant reflecting what was happening in their area through their music. This meant that they talked about what they were going through as blacks in the ghetto. To them, this was an experience that could not be summed up in the multicultural practices of the other rap communities. *On Stress and Strife (Who's Dat*

⁵ GCSE's are two-year courses that lead to examinations in particular subject areas including Math and English. Successful completion of GCSE's are equivalent to a US high school diploma. They allow a student to take further courses and A level classes.

⁶ A levels [Advance levels] are exams taken in the final year of school at age eighteen. Usually two to three subjects are taken. The A level is required for entry into

Yout?) [Who's That Youth] Dwayne raps,

The music and the zoot [marijuana] is a way for me to
 relax and fink [think] about anuva [another] day
 I try to get my mind, myself trained in life
 Get a job ting [thing] and do it right
 Statics hold me back, don't seem to proceed,
 So I start thinkin' of crime on the street
 Set ups, lashings, techs [guns], cashin' checks,
 Jugglin, getting' paid, getting' respect
 Hold up, I ain't finished, I still want garms
 [clothes]
 I deal with it with credit cards in my palms
 Purchase a key [kilogram of cocaine], hold life, cash
 2g [2000] in the front pocket of my fucked up Versace
 [Versace jeans]

In their minds, to be truthful was to be street, using
 street lingo and rapping about what they experience in
 British and Jamaican accents. Curtis was adamant about
 rapping in a British accent and at times I felt as though
 his anti-American sentiment was directed at me because I
 was American. In a radio interview on CHOICE FM's Friday
 Night Flavors Show, they talked about this.

Trus [trus] me, we got to keep that England accent
 goin' strong. YuknowwhatImean. I'm not even down wit
 no American ting [thing]. Yu know, like rappin' in
 American. If you're doin' that, that's yu [you] ting
 [thing] still. Fu [for] it to be UK hip hop, I feel
 that yu [you] gotta represent the UK and keep it how
 we are (pause) instead of comin' American. At the en'
 [end] of thu [the] day every mans [person] got to
 represent where they're from because if you're from
 London, you can't be goin' on like you're from
 Brooklyn, yuunderstan' [understand].

As they completed tracks for their album various

a university.

circumstances arose in which both Dwayne and Curtis faced criminal charges: Curtis for drug dealing and Dwayne for credit card fraud. Carlton was concerned because he felt that Curtis was "trying to live what he talked about on record." This meant that for Curtis, art was imitating life. An example of this is seen as Curtis raps,

Livin' it up, roughin' it up, champagne in ma cup, the
sensi buds [marijuana] that we bilin' [rolling a
marijuana cigarette] up
Unanimous winner with the alloys [car tire rims/hub
caps] on ma bima [BMW]
M3 power [BMW model], establish the color,
shiny silver like my drawa [gun] for my competitas
[competitors]

When Curtis rapped about this on record, it was in the context of metaphor and hyperbole. He may have wanted to own a BMW, but if so, he would have to take steps to acquire one. In this sense, Carlton was concerned. If Curtis talked about acquiring these expensive possessions, this would require a great deal of money. Given his lack of educational and occupational qualifications, Curtis would have difficulty earning money, unless illegally. He would, in other words, have to sell more drugs, thus putting himself in a more vulnerable position in relation to the law. Carlton was anxious to finish the record because he did not know how much longer both Curtis and Dwayne would be around. In the end, neither was convicted, but this

speaks to the tenuous nature of work and art for the reality rappers, as well as the pressures that black youth face on a daily basis.

B. Independent Rappers

The independents see rap as a cultural practice. The topics of their raps center more around issues that are outside of their immediate surroundings. While they rap about local surroundings they attempt to expand the boundaries of rap. They are in tune with non-mainstream or underground rap in the UK, US and other parts of the world, but do not participate in the dominant clothing or musical trends in rap. Instead, they use the philosophies and perspectives of hip hop to write and create music. They are critical of mainstream rap in the US which they see as lacking in creativity. During a recent visit to the US, Albert, one of my informants, told me that he found it hard to listen to commercial rap music after listening to New York's hip hop radio station 97.1 WQHT. He felt that this radio station too frequently played unimaginative rap music. Through their contact and networking with whites, blacks in this group got gigs and information about other money making opportunities and events. Apparently, gaining

income from hip hop is a matter not of what you know or how well you can rap, but of who you know. Whites who appreciate how well you perform and who have the capital to put on a show or event, are good connections. Therefore, in a business sense, the independents mix with whites, even though many of them have blacks as close friends.

Albert, an independent rapper from Hackney has close friends who are also from Hackney. They come to his apartment on a regular basis to socialize, eat and rap. Although he maintains a core of black friends, he comes into regular contact with other groups and moves between these spaces with relative ease, albeit with reservations. Because of his income and contacts he has opportunities that other blacks from working class backgrounds, such as the reality rappers, do not have. For example, he receives perks that he would not be able to otherwise afford such as trips to the US and Europe, free clothing from contemporary designers, equipment such as a digital camera and mini disc player. Because of his work in the hip hop community, he is able to travel throughout Europe and to the US, mainly New York City and Los Angeles. He does not collect dole and uses the connections that he has to "blag" [to figuratively steal] things. Like the reality rappers, Albert has to

hustle, but this is done in a different way and with different people. The products and level of access to resources that come out of this hustling call into question what the categories of working class and black entail.

Independants tend to have a more global view of rap music and hip hop culture. In many cases, they have enjoyed regular contact with foreign artists, meeting them when they do shows in London or through touring Europe. Ideas concerning rap and hip hop culture from around the world are exchanged through meetings and conversations. Essentially, this group has de-mystified the aura of US hip hop that they feel some Britons exhibit. Because of this exposure, my informants skeptically view mainstream US rap to be of average rather than superior quality, having seen it outside of the realm of videos and magazines through their contact with those involved in the United States. Because rap began in the US, to many, but not to them, the US style is seen as the original rap and somehow better than UK rap. In addition, the popularity and frequency of rap videos and publications from the US have established an almost hegemonic US rap aesthetic. However, as one informant from this group described US rap,

Some is good some is bad. I am not amazed now.
I have seen it from a different angle. They

have a lot of hype around them because they are American.

Albert's Nigerian background sets him apart from the reality rappers in the study. His speech and raps are further influenced by his experience in London's East End. In contrast, the reality rappers drew inspiration from their Jamaican background and the prevalence of Jamaican influence in popular music and street culture. Albert's raps were done in a more traditional cockney London street accent with an element of black street culture. Somewhere between his Nigerian, black British upbringing and his cockney background, Albert uses the neutral idiom of rap to orientate himself. Like the reality rappers, Albert raps about what is happening around him. However, not all of his material is serious. I saw him rap for fun on freestyles, but I also saw the link between his music and his critique of life in London as a member of the working class. On *Capital L City*, Albert raps,

Another night in the twisted, citi ugli and griti,
I'm sick of seein scab babies, yattis [woman] with
scavies
Enough to make you grab your lady
and hit the country,
Leap behind the smoke monkeys and nasty yuppies,
Beggars on the underground pleadin' and scroungin'.
Live and die by the pound, well can you help us,
hits you in your foul heart, like Alka Seltzer.
Fuck the general consensus, the rich and senseless.
Police wait til we're defenseless

so they can test us.
Broke, black, lonely and friendless on ghetto benches.
No whitewash or picket fences

Chorus

In the capital L the capital O the N D O N, we're all
chasin' papers, but we die pushin' pens

Although the reality rappers and Albert took different approaches to their music, they all talked about their social and economic disadvantage. Albert expressed much of the same talk about low income lack of and opportunity as the reality rappers. However Albert was more interested in transcending his surroundings through music. Calling attention to his social position was permissible in his music; however, dwelling on this position was uninteresting to him. Interestingly, Albert was more integrated within networks of white promoters and business people than the reality rappers. Yet, he still talked about discrimination based on class and race in music and conversation. This is evident in the above song when he characterizes his experience as being "broke, black, lonely and friendless on ghetto benches." Albert views London as a place with serious social problems but his visual depiction is exaggerated for effect.

Albert regularly reads popular culture magazines and various types of fiction and non-fiction books from the UK

and US. Through his father, he had access to books and records, especially vinyl, as a child. In turn, he sees these as important sources for writing raps and literary work. He has aspirations of moving his work in a more literary direction. Recently, he used some of his writing contacts to join with other blacks to put out a literary journal that served as the test press for a magazine called *Bourgie*⁷. The name *Bourgie* is a play on class and racial antagonism aimed at the black British bourgeois. It is meant to draw attention to the class distinctions found in the black community.

The journal is an attempt to fuse literary criticism, humor and popular journalism to communicate ideas to a diverse black audience. The journal also attempts to discuss the complexity of black identity within London's multicultural setting by posing the question of who and what black Britain encompasses. In its mission statement or manifesto as it is called in the journal, *Bourgie* asks

Is the gap in the market for Y3K 'black Radical literary' journal-isms? Or are we just poets, preachers, writers, lovers & ball-players? Yes! Maybe? Definitely? Even more possibly. 'BOURGIE' is a forum to represent the Diss-enfranchised, oversubscribed, hard-survival, inna gathering of tribes & global ties.

⁷ The term *bourgie* [bourgeois], came up regularly in interviews and discussions as a popular slang among my informants.

Maybe? Definitely? Even less possibly! Multi-media-formatted forums to discuss dissect and diffuse pop culture's blacked-out mainstream of consciousness. Creative throw-ups for those & by those who are passionate about their passions. Overdue? Definitely! *Vibe* Magazine with a mindset, a less anachronistic 'voice' newspaper, a jiggified [extravagant] *National Geographic*, *Lowdown* with a melanin Lobotomy Possibly.

The journal attempts to provide what Albert felt was a much needed black presence outside of the usual black-oriented magazines in London such as *Touch* and *Pride* as well as popular black newspapers like The Voice. The political slant of the journal is apparent in its choice of features. For example, *Bourgie* features an interview conducted by Albert with US rap artist Talib Kweli who discusses the way in which hip hop as a genre has been marketed, and how these marketing strategies relate to the development of black culture. In response to Albert's question regarding how black people value black artistic production Kweli states,

A: They [white kids] have access and money to get it [music]?

TK: It's the same thing in England with the white kids. Living in New York especially we're spoilt by it [hip hop]. It's all around us we don't have to search out the underground hip hop. That's the thing we have to see art for art. We can't let people tell us it's not art. We have to be the ones preserving it. If it's gonna be the white kids who are gonna support the records and be the fan base I don't have a problem with that. Good music is good music, people of all cultures, colours, creeds can appreciate good music. Then maybe some black kids who need the message can be

like 'what have I been missing?'

It was interesting that a conversation between a British and American artist about the global dissemination and practice of black culture would take this pensive tone.

Bourgie also contains a fictitious short story about the auction of Nigerian born afrobeat⁸ creator Fela Kuti's bones to white Englishmen. In a wider sense, this story reads as a metaphor for the exploitation of black culture by whites in the UK. In it, Kuti's bones are bid for at a mock auction by persons from the UK and US. In one line an Englishman states,

Damn those Yanks, they can never claim to understand 'Afrobeat' like us English boys. I mean we were ruling these people for decades of course we're down with [we like] the music.

Ironically, Albert has frequent contact with whites through his work at magazines and dee jaying. Rather than directly confronting those who he feels are exploiting black culture, he uses *Bourgie* to subtly address the unequal power relations in place in his work circles and in London more generally. It was a muted or subtle way to critique

⁸ Afrobeat is a musical genre that Fela Kuti pioneered. It combines African rhythms, chants with funk and soul music from the US. Much of Kuti's work was political music aimed at the authoritarian and corrupt state of his home, Nigeria, as well as the colonial regimes that occupied the African continent.

ideas of race and class.

C. Multiple Black Identities

The reality rappers and the independent rappers show the different backgrounds and experiences that blacks have in the rap community. In New Ethnicities (1988) Stuart Hall, making a key point in the debate concerning the creation of black racial and cultural identities, declares the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject. This well known work poses the idea that in examining black British identity,

What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature (Hall 1988:29).

The idea that the black community has a diverse make up is not debatable. It is incorrect to assume that all blacks from the West Indies and Africa have similar experiences. However, despite these differences, blacks have used rap to fit their own existences.

Back (1996) suggests that popular culture provides a lingua franca for working class youth in multicultural

environments. Here, groups from various racial backgrounds can interact within the context of popular culture. This represents a place where dominant ideas of race are suspended and racism can be challenged. While I agree that rap has brought groups together in certain ways, the terms under which these groups have contact, as well as the duration of these interactions, invite a closer examination of the relationships. How, for example, does multiculturalism address the complexities of black experiences and identities? In the UK, blacks have taken rap as a means of identity and used elements of US hip hop culture such as dress, slang, and technologies to further their practice of it. From its inception in England, rap has been strongly associated with working class blacks and some working class whites.

Rap along with other types of music such as jungle and drum and bass were instrumental for blacks in an attempt to express what is black and British. As there were initially few outlets for the development of black popular culture, rap, soul and reggae before it gave blacks a space for social and cultural interaction. In addition, some blacks became involved in rap as a cultural refuge. As Tim, a Nigerian informant, remarked,

T: A lot people in this country grow up and attempt to be West Indian. Hip hop gave me something else.

RC: Your background is not ragga [reggae orientated] but you can appreciate it?

T: Yeah, but I don't have to act it out and it's not the end all be all. I don't take it on and try to act like it. I don't forget where I come from. Hip hop gives me an opportunity to act independently, ragga wouldn't give me that opportunity to chat lyrics. Ragga wasn't for me, so I turned to hip hop.

The points at which black identity converge and diverge should be acknowledged. Throughout the time of the research, racial and ethnic discrimination within the category of black was discussed. For example, there was discrimination against Africans who were sometimes referred to as "Bobos" by blacks who considered themselves black British or West Indian. This was a derogatory term that meant backwards. In addition, Nigerians were sometimes stigmatized for allegedly engaging in credit card and other types of fraud. This influenced the way West Indians and other blacks, as well as the larger society saw them. Several informants brought up the idea that the West Indian cultural influence found in London was hegemonic and at times subsumed other black identities. The influence of West Indian culture on London street culture cannot be overlooked. It is apparent in the speech and musical taste of much of working class youth regardless of race or cultural background. However, some blacks felt as though

this influence was overarching, as it did not allow them to experience or express blackness in other ways.

Two of my black informants who were of Nigerian extraction raised this point. One suggested that in the past Africans like himself disassociated themselves from African accents and music to take up the Jamaican influence so that they would not stand out in relation to other blacks. In one sense, this influence is dominant and is absorbed somewhat passively. In other respects it is actively fetishized because it is associated with being tough and intimidating. The process of Jamaican cultural incorporation is not uniform as is shown in the way that different groups of informants treated this influence in and out of the context of rap. Yet, Jamaican elements shaped the way that many of my informants talked, the music that they listened to, and the music that they produced.

This situation is further complicated by the political context of the term "black" which, in the 1970s, included people of West Indian, African and South Asian descent. Scholar-activist, A. Sivanandan (1981) viewed the position of South Asians, African and Caribbean blacks as marginal. Hence they represent a stance from which to create an effective political movement and identity. Through their

common exclusions, a political struggle could be forged. In contrast, Modood (1994) emphasizes the complexity in using the term black to refer to people of African, West Indian, and Asian descent. He suggests that the term in Britain is not inclusive enough to identify and mobilize different groups that have been categorized as black. In his opinion, black cannot be a viable political category, as this category does not address the historical, cultural and political differences between people of African, West Indian and Asian descent.

An example of the difficulties in using "black" as a marker of identity between people of African, West Indian, and Asian descent is illustrated by Joe, a South Asian male rapper of Bangladeshi origin in his mid 20's. Joe grew up in North London in the same area as white reality rapper Steven. His income comes from illegal credit card schemes and selling stolen merchandise. He described himself as "having had problems" as a student and did not finish school. Once a graffiti artist he is now primarily a rapper. Of his involvement in rap Joe states,

When I was in a posse [group] there was no racial tension on me, on the white guys or the black guys because we were all dressin' ragga-hip hop. Everyone had a bandana and pin tucks [pants that are rolled tightly at the ankle] and jackin'-up [rolling up] your

trousers. I only stopped wearing pint-tucks recently. It was a fashion thing and a belonging thing.

Joe focuses on outward markers of black culture, but also discusses the relationships and bonds that grew out of his interactions with others in the context of rap. For Joe, the style and imagery associated with the rap aesthetic fuses together two of the primary influences on black culture in London--Jamaican and American. He understands participation in rap as a way to bring these strands together to establish an identity that is distinguishable within British culture.

Joe spoke of his uneasiness with the term black. Discussing his interactions with a number of blacks within the rap community Joe stated,

They [black segregationist rap proponents] can't comprehend when they look up and see something that looks like a Benetton add. Many colors many races, but with one common cause. At our events [Mudlumz] everyone knows that everyone is everyone. As long as you don't put violence on anyone at the jam then you're alright. They know that you are going to see anyone at the dance. They try and cage other people. They try and piss me off. Some lesbian bitch with no hair and hair wrap trying to tell me that I shouldn't hang out with white people. And she is a pork eater at that. Now nobody tries to recruit me, talking about we have to do our shows for us. A couple of years ago I was handing out flyers in front of Astoria and this guy [black] didn't want to take the flyer from Steven. Steven said that he still wanted the guy to come. The guy said to me that we have to stop this and do shows for our people. I said that Steven is more our people

than you will be to me.

In this instance, Joe calls into question the boundaries and definitions of who can authentically practice rap as well as how blackness is defined. As I sensed tension in this exchange, I asked Joe if the hip hop community is currently unified across racial lines. He replied,

Its unified, but there still is racial tension, but they hide it now. Black on white racial tension-the Nubian movement that happened about 10 years ago. It was all pendants, colors, now its come full circle again. I made a rap about this: in plenty kente, but inside their heads are empty preaching hatred to a Pinky [a white person], thinking back to Kunta Kente. I created a word for them-new bourgians. They are fronting [acting insincerely/dishonestly] on the new side of things. They have missed the point of Africa as a whole.

Within the context of urban popular culture, West Indian and black have become synonymous in London. Given the significant number of Africans and Asians living in London, do ideas of cultural interaction include these people? Are national differences addressed by these ideas? In certain cases, people chose to identify with a larger black urban community and rap and hip hop culture becomes a way to define both individuals and lines of solidarity. At the same time, people are West Indian, African, Asian or British hip hoppers, depending on the context.

In all, participation in rap has become a way to level out some of these differences, but this does not mean that difference disappears; instead it is negotiated through rap. In other words, the idea of race is dealt with situationally. For people of African and West Indian descent, rap appears to be a neutral space in which both can participate. For people of Asian descent, the situation seems slightly different, as experiences of racism have affected them in alternative ways to that of people of African and West Indian descent. In turn, alliances based on marginalization are less fixed. Cultural difference alone does not capture the choices that people make or the conditions that influence their decisions about how to create culture and with whom. This points to a type of black urban identity that is always being created, in relation to both racial, class and culturally based discrimination.

D. The Mid Atlantic

One last development in black British identity that I will discuss lies in the collaborative nature of music and identity that results from contact between the UK and the US. During my research, I saw a great deal of musical

contact between the US and UK and in rap this link seems to be increasing⁹. As I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation, US culture pervades London. For people in my study, the local and global become explicitly linked in the development of rap as London rap develops and maintains a British sound. Effectively, a mid Atlantic approach to making music and rapping has developed, whose influence lies between the US and UK. Raps, accents and vocabulary all change with the movement of people and ideas between the UK and US. Because this takes place in the context of rap, it demonstrates the important point that elites are not alone to reflect experiences of travel and exposure to other "cosmopolitan" places. Although, some of the literature on globalization would have us think otherwise, the working class enjoys this exposure as well. In this case, my informants actively took on a role whereby ideas about rap were exchanged in a pointed way through discussion and participation.

Some combination of UK and US rappers with British production skills provide many of the new sounds that I

⁹ In this chapter I focus on black British collaborations. However, similar interactions occur outside of London with non-black. For example, The Creators and The Nextmen who are rap production teams, have collaborated with US rappers.

call the "mid Atlantic." However, as discussed in the previous chapter, it should be remembered that this is not a new phenomena as earlier mcs such as Monie Love and Slick Rick showed examples of this approach to making music. This type of music straddles the UK and US divide to include rap styles from both places in one piece of work. In current incarnations, the sound is more experimental than US rap. For example, mcs with different styles or flows are used, including reggae influenced rappers. This type of mix is seen in the work of UK rap producer Dobie on his album *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*. Dobie uses British rappers Roots Manuva and Rodney P on two of the album's records. On *Connectivity* Roots Manuva opens up the album with a song about his affinity for UK rap. *Love and Hate* features Rodney P in a trademark cockney rude boy [rough person] rap. Dobie also uses US rappers on two of the other songs. He has a non-vocal mix that draws on a montage of hip hop records from the past, spliced together to form a sonic montage. The record is appropriately called *B-boy's*¹⁰ *Revenge*. *Rado X*, another song on the album features a loop sampled from legendary American jazz saxophonist John Coltrane's jazz-waltz *Greensleeves*, as the main melody

¹⁰ B-boy is the name given to early break dancers. It is

alongside a slow female rap.

Like many of the people in this study, Dobie is of Jamaican descent and has visited the US since the 1980s. At that time, he created links between artists in both the US and the UK with whom he would later collaborate. He has also worked with Icelandic singer Björk on her re-mix¹¹ album *Telegram*, where he produced the song *I Miss You*. The song begins with a sampled piano chord from the American soul and jazz artist Roy Ayers' *Everybody Loves the Sunshine*. This is combined with Björk's vocals and complemented by a rapped verse from Rodney P. The song is a mid tempo vocal track with Rodney's reggae rap, a hip hop beat and Björk's ballad style singing. Dobie's approach to making music is effective in showing how one can bring, jazz, rap, and reggae into one framework. Drawing on his rich musical background, he accomplishes the mixture fairly easily. *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* as a whole and his other work can be viewed as a dynamic interplay of black Britain's cultural influences. In turn, this becomes characteristic of other types of identities that are being formed. Dobie's music is an example of the way in which

also a slang term for someone that is involved in hip hop.

¹¹A re-mix is an additional alternative version of a record.

culture among blacks in London is produced out of personal, musical and technological links to the black diaspora.

Another example of this approach to making music is seen in the London based rap group, 57th Dynasty. This group is made up of individuals from the UK and US. Their music combines reggae beats and delivery with an unpolished US production style that is reminiscent of the earlier US rap group Wu tang Clan. The way that rappers in the group deliver their lyrics is greatly influenced by one of the main rappers, Paradise, who recently moved to London from the Bronx. As a result, the members sound like a mix between UK and US black vernacular. Further completing their diasporic links is the assertion that their base, Brixton, represents the sixth borough of New York. Such an affiliation is meant to position Brixton as an extension of the five boroughs of the city through the practice of rap. This effectively reduces the geographical and musical differences between the two communities. Here, the cultural products of parts of the diaspora become available for use at black Britons' convenience.

Section III. Culture as Politics

This last section considers the political aspect of cultural creation. Here, I discuss blacks involvement in rap and the wider ramifications this has for the development of black British culture and identity.

The creation of and participation in rap and other forms of popular culture becomes a space of expression that separates blacks from mainstream or middle class British society. Rap encompasses an approach to making music and culture that is opposed to British society in terms of the way that it uses vernacular speech of the UK and US in a particular oral strategy. This essentially gives a voice to the voiceless as rap provides black London and others an additional way to go against the grain. In the US, viewing rap in this context may be problematic because of rap's commodification. But in places such as London where rap is not embedded in a strong industry, where there are poor groups with limited economic options, rap is a different, immediate part of people's lives. Rap acts as a way out that allows marginalized groups to define other terms under which they will be involved in London's society.

As Amilcar Cabral (1973) insightfully demonstrated, issues of politics are directly tied to ideas of cultural development. In the UK, the social context as influenced by

issues of racism has directly impacted the way in which black people develop concepts of race and culture. In turn, I see the development of these concepts as a political endeavor. I do not suggest that any random act can or is political in the same way that not every defiant act is an act of resistance. The cultural acts of black people in this study are politicized from both inside and outside of the community. For example, a well known black columnist and London's former candidate for mayor, Trevor Philips, stated in an article entitled *The Myth of Gold Chains and No Brains*

Coming from 'the street' is the latest test of authenticity for us [blacks]. We are only genuine if we speak Jamaican, wear expensive clothes and reject anything that resembles formal education or scholarship (Guardian August 20, 2000).

Philips continues to make a connection between gangsta (gangster) chic and rap as he says,

For a very few, it pays off; gangsta' chic is worth millions to those who persuade middle class white kids that listening to rap albums and wearing Tommy Hilfiger can bring the thrill of the ghetto to the suburbs (Guardian August 20, 2000).

Philips' conflation of rap, race and dysfunctional culture sounds like the culturalist debates that have been recycled in the US since the 1960s. It is interesting that this view of working class people is global in scope. Here,

rap and the abstract idea of the "street" is a cancer not only to blacks but also to whites. Basically to act in any other way besides "respectable middle class British" aligns one with what Philips derogatorily calls the street. Here, the street and middle class sensibilities are defined as polar opposites. People who are involved in non-mainstream cultures such as hip hop are placed in an alternative and maligned position in London as a result of this dichotomy. Therefore, to maintain this culture becomes an act that is politicized whether those participants want it to be or not. To assume that culture is not politicized in Britain is to prematurely assume that people have given up their class and racial biases.

Using the work of James Scott (1985) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), historian Robin Kelley (1994) puts forward an approach to various forms of resistance that black working class groups have historically undertaken in the US. Although his argument concerns the US, it is also applicable to the development of black popular culture in the UK. In line with deCerteau (1984) his analysis examines the daily struggles of groups. Kelley examines these struggles with an approach that views what groups undergo in resisting power, authority and what these forms of

resistance illustrate concerning their relation to that power and authority. He then goes on to discuss how popular and expressive culture are points of resistance that reflect informal forms of participation and representation. In conceptualizing the link between popular culture and politics Kelley states,

I reject the tendency to dichotomize people's lives, to assume that clear-cut "political" motivations exist separately from issues of economic well-being, safety, pleasure, cultural expression, sexuality, freedom of mobility, and other facets of daily life. Politics is not separate from lived experiences or the imaginary world of what is possible; to the contrary, politics is about these things (Kelley 1994:9).

My research suggests that the next step in the cultural politics in the UK is using popular culture as a further tool of political and cultural expression in local surroundings.

Conclusion

To conclude, a paradox occurs in the process of racial formation for blacks as they attempt to negotiate and incorporate themselves into a multi-cultural society that does not want to include them due to ideas of cultural (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Stolcke 1993), biological (Barken 1992; Stepan 1982) and structural (Gilroy 1988; Lawrence 1982; Solomos 1989) racism. The cultural practices

of my black working class informants have been marginalized as "street", but at the same time embraced by working class white youth and eventually mainstream society. However subtly, the idea of an incompatibility of certain populations with that of traditional Britain prevails in popular discourse, intensifying the racialization of people of African descent. A crucial point that people of African descent face in developing ideas of race and class in multicultural contexts then becomes: how do race and class interact in the realm of popular culture and what are the ramifications for cultural, racial and class identity? Clearly, ideas of race must be constructed in a manner that simultaneously defines blackness and the ways that this blackness is treated in British society.

Through rap, informants used the vernacular as a way to communicate, express themselves with a certain oral style, and make use of accessible low cost technologies. This is part of a larger legacy of black Britons using forms of black American culture to define themselves culturally. Blacks in London felt a certain kind of alliance with blacks in the US although many had not and never would visit the US. This alliance was somewhat measured because blacks in London realized that there were

differences in the economic and political landscape between the UK and US.

Early, in rap, blacks had a cultural space that was shared with whites. Here social events served two functions. The first allowed blacks to publicly practice and participate in what was defined as black culture, mainly through listening to music while interacting with other blacks. The second allowed an alternative sphere for the creation and practice of popular culture that included the presence and perspectives of a multiracial group. This essentially sees black culture as a space or "empty" category for the expression of alternative cultural practices. The dual nature of the cultural practices of blacks should be acknowledged. It is in this context that London develops its multicultural tendencies.

Here, issues of diasporic connections and links become problematic. In my estimation, there exists the analogy of race in the US and UK, but the "Americanization" of black British popular culture has specific limitations. It translates into a related rather than literal critique of race despite the similarity of social positions based around experiences of racial and class discrimination.

Rap remains a lifestyle that my informants wanted to

maintain in terms of the how they made money, spoke, dressed, and viewed society. Rap is the music of the dispossessed, or it was at one time, before being so highly commercialized. In places such as London, where rap is not as mediated or interpreted through the media and marketing, it takes on a specific tone. Those involved in rap and hip hop, it seems, can react to this in one of two ways. They can absorb the mainstream ideas that are disseminated about rap music and in turn emulate this in their dress, speech and musical production. Another response is to attempt to assimilate some of the cultural aspects of rap not only through dress, speech and musical production, but also by using rap as a philosophical influence rather than just a template. Many working class blacks in London have taken the former course.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHITES IN LONDON RAP

Introduction

The data in this chapter are based on participant observation and interviews conducted with rappers of European origin. The chapter discusses the theme of white working class participation in rap. I focused on this segment of the community because I wanted to understand the creation of culture in a multi-racial context where different groups dialogue, rather than looking at white participation in isolation from other groups. The informants are part of the same rap community as the informants in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I primarily focus on the rappers of European decent however. This group consists of those youths who grew up in the inner city in close contact with blacks. They feel that they have much in common with black people because of their similar class position.¹ The notion of choice is critical to

¹ De Mott (1988) draws interesting parallels between the subcultures of white working class youth in the UK and black working class youth in the US.

the discussion of the cultural practices of this group and it forms the backdrop for much of the chapter.

Section I. Interactions

This section re-visits some of the literature concerning the participation of whites in black culture. It frames much of the chapter by bringing out a number of key issues relating to white and black contact in the context of popular culture. In addition, I provide an ethnographic perspective concerning the contact between these groups.

A. Literature

There has been a significant amount of research on the appropriation of black culture by white working class youth. What follows is a theoretical and content overview of the major studies that are related to this chapter.

In New Ethnicities and Urban Culture (1996), Les Back provides a sociological account of inter-racial youth contact in South London. This study presents the creation of culture among youth in multi-cultural contexts as a syncretic process. The author stresses the idea that culture is produced in a fluid dialogue between different localized groups. Back's use of the cultural intermezzo

concept summarizes this approach. Here, culture is viewed as a process involving mutable entities whose interaction among multiple groups creates an urban cultural form that is akin to an ethnicity. It is suggested that racism is challenged as these new identities are formed. In a similar way to Hewitt (1986), Back provides an interesting examination of the use of creole speech among white youth. This serves as an example of the syncretic and multi-layered aspects of cultural formation in urban settings.

In Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1979), Dick Hebdige offers a well-known reading of the appropriation of West Indian culture by white working class youth in the UK. His semiotic formulation of cultural interaction focuses on the engagement that white youth had with African American and West Indian culture during the 1950s through the 1970s. Hebdige looks at the successive cultural contacts between white youth and the emerging population of West Indian descent in the UK. In his estimation, an examination of white working class appropriation of black culture provides a 'phantom history of race relations' (Hebdige 1979:45).

Also writing in the 1970s, Chambers (1975), like Hebdige, suggests that white working class groups in the UK appropriated black music as a rebellious tool that allowed

them to critique larger systems of working class exploitation and alienation. Noting the influence of black American music, Chambers states that this occurs because

Embedded in black culture, in black music, are oppositional values which in a fresh context served to symbolize and symptomize the contradictions and tensions played out in British working class youth sub-cultures (Chambers 1975:166).

Both Chambers and Hebdige describe a scenario where white youth engage in processes of appropriation in order to form a cohesive working class identity. Symbols associated with the dress and style of West Indian culture as created by black working class youth in the UK are inverted and re-contextualized so they become associated with the white working class. In other words, the borrowing of symbols is undertaken to define white working class removal from mainstream society and in turn re-define their racial and class position within a larger racial and class hierarchy. In effect, white working class youth represent a marginalized class position where the style of West Indians vicariously defines their white working class identity.

In Black Culture, White Youth Jones (1988) discusses the interaction between white youth and black culture, as white youth become involved in the reggae community of Birmingham, a West Midlands urban environment. The author

focuses on the points of contact and interaction in relation to the creation of hybrid identities in inner cities. Jones views this involvement as a means by which white working class youth can address working class marginalization as experienced through poor schooling, unemployment and police harassment. The cultural tools of resistance of black youth such as reggae thus serve white resistance. Through ethnographic methods, Jones seeks to move beyond the 'phantom' history of race relations that Hebdige discusses to ethnographically address the relations between actual whites and blacks.

In relation to the appropriation of black culture Jones states,

In the British context, the racial connotations of American forms have been submerged and mediated by a relative distance between their "black" point of origin and their "white" context of consumption (Jones 1988:xxiv).

By using the symbols of black British people, white working class youth essentially attempt to experience their class position through the differentiated culture of black youth. An interesting historical analogy can be seen in the phenomenon of minstrelsy in the US during the 19th century as discussed by Eric Lott (1993). Participating whites saw themselves as occupying a similar class position to that of

blacks and their engagement with minstrelsy constituted an inter-racial dialogue borne out of a simultaneous feeling of disdain, exotification and fascination, fostered by inter-racial contact. In a wider sense, this type of racial identification demonstrated that "it was through blackness that class was staged" (Lott 1993:64). While I do not think that my white informants are modern day minstrels, I do feel it is useful to examine their participation in rap in a similar way, examining how class and race impact whites' involvement in black culture. In my view, the social and cultural products of these interactions should be analyzed. Stephens (1992) notes the ability of rap music in the US to start a dialogue between groups. A similar situation occurs in London, but the important question is how these relations are mediated and how they relate to wider issues of race and class.

Might the appropriation of black American culture by white British youth be an attempt to construct and define an alternative space for expressing working class, primarily male, interests. Such a use of black culture is not new. In many ways, black culture is assumed to be inherently able to give voice and expression to white working class youth due to the way in which it incorporates

qualities that are antithetical to mainstream white culture. As Jones has written, black music was

Valued here [1950s UK] for its rebellious edge and its ability to express a particular kind of hedonistic 'freedom' unavailable in the dominant white culture. As dance music, moreover, black American forms have provided countless generations of young whites a whole repertoire of styles. Through the expressiveness of the vitality of the rhythms, they revolutionized popular dance culture as a whole in post war Britain. Their impact unleashed a new phase in the popularity of public dancing, by cultivating more expressive uses of the body and a greater concern for the musical immediacy and emotional spontaneity (Jones 1988: xxiii).

Section III. Whites in Rap

This section is an ethnographic view of the participation of whites in rap. Material from my informants will be examined in relation to some of the key concepts brought up in the literature.

Ethnography and Discussion

I begin the discussion with an excerpt from an interview with Steven, a white reality rapper. The following serves as an example of how race and class impact the practice of rap among my white informants.

RC: Do you think rap is a black music form?

S: No not at all. Look at the MOBO² awards. I will say this while the tape is running. If someone asks me where hip hop began, I think that it began when U-Roy [early reggae artist] touched a mic [microphone] on a sound system. He was the first to chat a couple of rhymes. Then you had Herc [US hip hop pioneer] going to America. I saw it evolve in my lifetime. I was there. Was it the first person on the African drum? Yeah, then all music is of black origin. Def Leppard [UK rock band] all that. We could say that about any form of music. If you want to tell me that hip hop is black music I will say that is the stupidest thing that I've ever heard in my life. The way I see it, I own hip hop. I got it in my pocket. I own the rights to it. Don't tell me that I have no right in it. I have as much right as KRS-1 [US rap artist] has.

In the above excerpt, Steven expresses his view concerning the origins of rap as well who can and should participate in it and in what capacity. During our exchange, he displayed a sentiment that was not uncommon among white informants--namely, that rap knows no color and should not be politicized in this way. Hip hop was in turn seen as a culture and rap was viewed as a practice that was inclusive in contrast to being tied to a racial identity or linked with particular racial groups. This is in contrast to some of the black informants who saw rap as a contested cultural space whose development and participation is

² MOBO is an acronym that stands for the Music of Black Origin. It is an annual award ceremony for individuals and groups for achievements in music. Like other awards, it is divided into categories such as best rap group, best r & b song, and best producer. The award is not limited to black artists as a number of white artists are nominated.

subject to debate.

Steven made the distinction between himself and other whites by recalling his experiences in Yorkshire before he moved to London. He stated,

Whites in this area were white trash, eating the cheapest beans and bread³. I was brought up around West Indian culture and surroundings. I grew up hearing roots and lovers rock [reggae genres]. It was a reggae and Motown environment I was brought up in. I was a reggae toaster before. I was toasting before hip hop came around. I saw some people chatting and I was a white guy with a Yorkshire accent saying give me the mic [microphone]. I was smashing the place down with lyrics. They told me that I was on their team. I would be the gimmick, a little white guy that could chat yardie [Jamaican] lyrics.

Like other white informants in the study, Steven has adopted a language that is steeped in the vocabulary and dialect of black working class groups. He also walks with a swagger cum waddle that moves from left to right in an almost violent shift. On occasions when I walked with him in the street, people stared, glared or otherwise gave him undue attention. Visually, Steven has assumed the dress style that is associated with black youth. Of his appearance he remarked,

I hate to stereotype. Stereotypes of white rappers—that term wigger [white nigger], wonky [wog

³ Beans and bread or beans on toast is a popular and inexpensive meal or snack that is eaten by a racial and class cross-section. In this context, it is used as to reference a working class meal.

(derogatory racial slur for a black person) and honky] and that whole thing. I never had an identity crisis or was confused about who I was. Someone might see me and see a pattern [haircut design] in my head and a gold tooth in my mouth and they might think that oh well there goes a wigga. I hate to stereotype, but if someone said that there goes one of them white hip hop guys (pause) that's what I am.

During our first interview, Steven wore an AVIREX leather jacket (popular US hip hop gear), Moschino (designer) jeans and Nike Air Max sneakers. His hair had zig-zag patterns cut into the side of his head. He had several gold teeth, one of which was on his front tooth. Steven also adorned himself with a No Limit⁴ medallion. The medallion is significant because during the interview Steven remarked that he wanted to use entrepreneurial principles similar to those used by Masta P (see note 4) to start a record company. In particular, he wanted to use the money that he made from his legal and non-legal income to set up a record label in his local area.

The issue of race, class and rap intersect for Steven and the other white rappers discussed in this chapter in

⁴ No Limit is the name of a US rap record label owned by popular US rapper Masta P. Masta P is from the projects in New Orleans and has gained fame by putting out albums and several low budget self produced movies on video of which *I'm Bout It* is the best known. It is reported that he built a 400 million dollar business empire that includes a record label, sports management agency as well as other ventures from a \$5,000 inheritance.

the way that the wider society evaluates them. The terms "wigger" and "wonky" implicitly link their racial identity and class position with that of black people. In this instance, wiggers are those white people who have been brought up around black people and who have taken on elements of a "black" identity. Although the term wigger can be extended to whites who have not had intense interaction with blacks yet passively emulate black culture, the group discussed here has long standing contact with blacks. These terms are meant to be insults, which illustrate the discourse and feelings that surround the category of black in the UK. To be a nigger is bad enough, but to be a white nigger defies logic, as one effectively attracts an additional set of biases onto oneself. The stares and comments directed towards this group speak to this.

During interviews, I explored the interactions that whites had with black people and black culture. For example, I posed the question about exposure to black culture to Fred, a white informant in his mid 20's. Fred is the brother of Charles, a white independent rapper. Both Charles and his brother Fred are part of a rap group called Task Force. Fred is a talented writer and visual artist as

well as rapper. His income comes primarily from rapping and occasionally selling a small amount of marijuana. He has a son whose mother is black. He is no longer involved in a romantic relationship with the baby's mother, but he does see her frequently. In reference to his exposure to black culture he seemed puzzled, appearing to search for an explanation. He informed me that,

I use a lot of Jamaican slang and slang words that are not necessarily Jamaican, but black. I am interested in it myself. I have gone more to one side than the other. When I was young, I used to roll up my trousers like I was a ragga muffin [rough youth]. As I was growing I thought that this is ragga for me. As I got older I realized that if I was going to be like this I realized what I attracted. It's quite strange man. I loved the image. It was all about being rough and everyone looked like that and was on that bandit thing, banditos...whites and blacks. I have never hung out with a group that was either black or white. It was always a big mix. Then I was into graffiti and graf is very integrated too.

Fred emphasized that he had appropriated the external signs of black culture such as dress and language that for him defined blackness and opposed mainstream whiteness, integrating these markers into the larger image that he chose to create for himself.

My white informants did not see race as particularly salient despite the high frequency of contact between racial and cultural groups. In my observation, this group interacted on a daily basis with blacks and Asians in their

homes, at social gatherings and other activities. In part this has to do with the North London area in which they lived--a part of the city with a reputation for being racially integrated. In the words of one of my informants,

Back in the day there were proper skin heads and shit from Peckingham, but they stayed up there. This part [Islington] was very mixed. This estate, when we were young...there was everything, everything...we were hearing, Vietnamese, Turkish, Cypriot. There were all kinds of youts, African, Indian youts. And that's how we grew up and it was alright (smiles).

During the time that I spent with whites in their homes, a racially mixed group was often present. As I remarked in chapter one, the flats of my informants were nodes of activity. In addition to rap records and recording equipment, the walls of the front room of Fred and Charles's flat were covered with album covers from past black American and British rap figures. This room is where most rapping and other rap related activities took place. On the walls were pictures of Charles, Fred, Steven, and Joe together with their black and white friends as part of the M.U.D. Family in various poses at rap jams. This particular collective, M.U.D. Family was well known as being multi-racial in composition. When their name was mentioned to others in the community it was accepted that it had a varied racial make-up.

Significantly, the verbal interactions between blacks and whites in this group took place in black street slang--an accent and references revolving around a mix of Jamaican and black British slang with London accent and dialect. As Hewitt (1986) observed, among this group, the use of creolized speech is highly situational, contingent upon who is present and the degree of familiarity that the white youth have with blacks. The use of such speech patterns is characteristic of many whites in London's inner city areas. Along with speech, black and white members of the group sported fade⁵ and baldie [bald or almost bald] haircuts, cut each other's hair, gave handshakes [touching clenched fists together which is associated with black people], listened primarily to rap and reggae music and wore specific brands of clothes that were associated with hip hop. These are behaviors that at one time distinguished people of African descent in the UK, but now have been absorbed into the cultural practices that define a general inner city street aesthetic. Organized around participation in rap, the practices of these white rappers problematized what it meant to be white and urban. In my own research, I

⁵ In this context, a fade is a haircut that is associated with black people. It features a gradation of short hair at the ears and back of the neck, gradually increasing in

began to question whether whiteness and blackness were styles of dress, ways of speaking, or world views and whether they can be acquired.

The lines where whiteness was maintained and blackness entered existed of course, but they were blurred. This group of informants negotiated the constructed boundaries of race on a situational basis. To maintain their credibility and "right" to practice black codes, the whites I studied carefully navigated their whiteness so as not to seem inauthentic or insensitive in the eyes of blacks. In addition to maintaining speech and dress patterns that were associated with blacks, this group also showed solidarity with non-whites by setting themselves apart from other whites whom they critiqued or ridiculed. For example, I once asked Charles if he drank at pubs. He laughed and derogatorily referred to patrons as "pub men." This reference is meant to conjure up the image of an ignorant, pint-drinking man who showed signs of jingoism. In addition, other whites were sometimes talked about as posers in the context of hip hop. They were denigrated on the grounds that they were recent converts who saw hip hop as a fad rather than a culture.

length towards the top of the head.

All relations between blacks and whites were not smooth, however. In certain cases blacks questioned these whites' authenticity and identity. For example, Charles has a short fade haircut, a side to side gait, and regularly speaks with a black street slang. One day during a field visit, he recounted to me how earlier in the day at a photography shoot for a magazine,

A dread [person with dreadlocks] called us [Charles and his brother] niggers and threatened to kill us. I told him that I was not black so don't call me a nigger. It didn't matter whether I was called nigger. It happens all the time.

I was surprised that the word nigger had found its way to London. It is ironic that the person who called them this chose to use a word that has been so canonized in American racial discourse. Interestingly, upon telling me this story, Charles maintained a sense of surprise that despite his physical appearance and speech patterns he would be called such a name. In all, he seemed frustrated by this.

In such exchanges, the boundaries, in terms of understanding and experience, between people who emulate and practice black culture and those who are black became apparent. Charles, like other whites with whom I spoke, felt that race and culture should not be discussed, in or

out of the context of the rap community. At the same time, he was one of few whites who saw himself, as a white participant in a black musical culture, something he verbally acknowledged. He said that he felt comfortable only in black hip hop clubs. His views were influenced by his recognition that there were boundaries for whites in these spaces. He said,

As a white person speaking, I prefer being in a club where there are less white people because that's the way I remember it being. Sometimes there was a hostile thing but as long as you remember that this is not your house, you're cool.

Charles was clearly nostalgic for the earlier days of hip hop when blacks had a much more visible presence in London. To him the issue of authenticity is realized through socializing and rapping with certain kinds of persons. Effectively, the term "house" is a metaphor for a physical structure where rap among blacks takes place while denoting the black presence in rap. A white crowd does not fit Charles's idea of what rap music and hip hop culture entail. In relation to venues that have a predominantly white attendance like Scratch, he went on to say,

Scratch is more of a white crowd to me and they are not hip hop. I am white and I can say that. It's kind of a shame really because they give white hip hop listeners a bad name because they really don't know what they are doing. None of them are proper graffers

[graffiti artists], dee jays. I think that a lot of that club is homosexual.

This quote suggests that Charles does not associate middle class whites with being a part of hip hop. By critiquing the way that they relate to rap, he distances himself from them. In his opinion, they have given whites in rap like himself "a bad name." Therefore, he does not see himself tied to them by class or race, as is evidenced by the more authentic way that he feels he is involved in rap and hip hop. In Charles's view, to "be" hip hop is not to be middle class and not to exhibit whiteness as they do. Other whites like Steven talked about hip hop as a practice that had no racial, but a class and perhaps, gender component instead.

A white suburban hip hop artist told me that race was an issue for him because black dee jays did not want to play his music even though it was in his opinion better than what the black dee jays tend to play. This was one of the few cases where a white artist expressed concern that there was discrimination against him by blacks. However, this artist started his own record label and was able to distribute his music more widely than black and some white artists. While he felt that this discrimination was pointed, it did not significantly affect the popularity or

distribution of his music. Working with "in house" artists, most of whom are white, he has moved ahead. Like most whites, he seemed unaware, unable to recognize or unwilling to discuss the tensions that potentially exist in rap around race and class. The existence of such unequal opportunities is an aspect of these tensions.

The process of appropriation of black culture by white youth is part of a historically larger process of cultural borrowing and practice. It is common to see rap as a hybrid cultural form. Moreover, the globalization of media alongside the increased marketability of rap and the multicultural make up of UK society has enabled a much more diversified population to be involved than previous appropriations of culture, such as reggae, would allow. From the perspective of my white informants, rap transcends racial and national boundaries, producing an expressive working class culture.

The issue of class is an important factor in the practice of rap. In addition to providing a means to represent their marginal position, rap and other popular culture forms address the emptiness of the category of whiteness (Roediger 1993). Whites seem to be questioning the category of white as an empty signifier of a nebulous

identity and particular history. This is extremely important to the current generation of whites and blacks who openly question what it means to be culturally British. It is the class and racial politics involved in the practice of rap that this project attempts to uncover and discuss. This process represents a strand of the white working class experience but does not encompass the experiences of all white youth.

In addressing race through their practice of rap, the groups I studied added their own vernacular and racial and class experiences to their raps. Similarly, Bennet's (1999) sociological account shows the way in which white working class youth in Yorkshire relate and practice their own version of rap music as they address concepts of locality, community and authenticity. In Bennet's case, however, the practice of rap took place in isolation from other racial and cultural populations, as whites in North England created and participated in a "celebration of blackness in the absence of blackness" (Bennet 1999:8). Bennet discusses the tensions that are involved around the creation of white identity via the incorporation of black culture but does so within a primarily white setting.

As Back (1996) insightfully states, many whites who

have black friends reject or seek to break the link between racism, whiteness and Britishness. According to my informants, ideas of whiteness are not only tied to British, but are also related to class. Middle class whites who do not have the same relation to rap as the informants represent an additional type of white person, reflecting the diversity of whiteness. For the informants, relevant issues in diversifying whiteness include Britishness, class identification, racial alliances with blacks and others, as well as the depth of these relationships. This can be seen in Fred's discussion of his alienation from other whites in rap. He stated, "I don't know how these people [other whites] experience it [rap]. They are doing it for other reasons than me. Maybe it's a class thing. I don't know".

Section IV. Inequalities

In this section I pay special attention to the issue of class in the practice of rap, including the expression of inequality in musical content.

A. Class Antagonism

Class antagonism was evident in the white informants' disdain for "being bourgie" [slang term for bourgeois] and

leaving the area in which they grew up. To move to an affluent area was seen as not only a rejection of their area, "the Bury", but also a move to an area that was stale and aloof, which would not allow them to act in character. Such moves were inconsistent with their experiences as working class youth. In addition, such a move indicates a changing social and class position that severs links to where one came from. This is otherwise known as "switching." In a song, *Rich N' Switch* reality rappers Steven and Joe state,

S. Would you ever get rich and switch?

J. No not me

S. If I won the lottery, I'd have to use the money properly

Back to my community to build total monopolies

For all the pickany [Jamaican slang term for children] in all da Itchy Town fraternity don't stand a chance in life, that's what's concerning me

It's burnin' me, so we burn the tree [marijuana] the ghetto way

J. But wha [what]?

S. But we don' [don't] want to get away

J. We be here to stay

Even when tings [things] get dread [bad], but we won't get rich and switch to Hampstead [affluent area of London]

Bishop's Avenue [affluent area of London] to me look like true luxury,

But there's no place like home, so big up to the Bury [the informant's neighborhood]

We not tryin' to be bourgie

Don't want to do no phat [good] rap track and no sell out movie

I guess you all know the coup, like Ice-T [American rapper] get rich and switch into a fuckin' kangaroo

Here, Steven's lyrics state that if he were to win the lottery, he would "use the money properly/back to my community to build total monopolies" to help those that "don't stand a chance in life." In this context, rap becomes a means to express dissatisfaction with the lack of resources that are focused on his North London neighborhood.

This music also touches on how to a make living through means that subvert the system. In this context, the daily struggle to gain income is described as "the runnins" [runnings]. As talked about in chapter one, the need for money other than a dole check is a necessity. *On The Half of It*, Steven illustrates his form of reality rap when he raps,

The runnins are risky but those days, they done
 I no longer think for me. I think for my son
 From day one, A little yout [youth] having fun
 If I don't make it in rap, I'll probably grow to be a
 bum
 What's the outcome?
 Heads are tryin' to get me out done
 But I will do it till I die, refuse to be out done

In addition, the music considers the problems that working class youth experience in their neighborhoods. A topic that was repeatedly discussed in the music was the lack of opportunity. Steven voices his attempt to understand his marginal social position as he raps,

So how could you know
And that's just from taking one look at me
A mediocre opinion of my mentality,
Goes deeper and deeper too far from my imagination
I crack a smile, but my mind is full of frustration
About my daily dealings, what I have to face
And here's your first chance to put yourself in my
place

This is a reasonable sentiment for those that feel that their social and political needs have not been met. For example, most of the members of Steven's, Charles', and Fred's immediate peer group did not finish school and had to make money in ways that put them in a tenuous relationship with the legal system. Without a formal education and standard employment, they were in a disadvantaged position to compete in London's economy. Despite their dissatisfaction with the resources in the neighborhood, their critique was focused on their marginal position rather than on the neighborhood itself. Like many of other rappers in the study, their neighborhood is revered.

Finally, the music also reflects the language of the group's multicultural orientation as seen in its combination of North London and Jamaican slang and philosophy. This is evident in Steven's use of the term of "over-standing" which is tied to the beliefs of Rastafari. Over-standing is a play on the word "understanding" that

essentially means to fully comprehend something that has been mystified. Overturning the conventional term understanding, Steven raps,

I seek overstandin' to tell me why it has to be
 63,000 youts [youths] in yout's [youth's] custody
 Look in my eye glare stare
 My eye will shine.
 Why, because I smoke the branch [marijuana].
 It's just to help me get through my circumstance.
 Still I get mines, through crime if it's my only
 chance

Steven and his peer group critique ideas of Britishness and race through a medium that at one time was associated with black people. And although, they realize that they are obviously not black they nevertheless have a similar relation to rap as blacks. A certain dress [banditos], affiliation [posse] and choice of music [rap] enhance their sense of belonging. In this instance, racial boundaries are not focused upon in the same way as in the larger society, thanks to the collective participation in rap.

This group represents an interstitial category between other working and middle class whites and other racial groups. In other words, they do not quite fit into the racial category of white, but they are not completely accepted by blacks. The experience of the informants did not reflect those of other working class whites in British

society nor did it reflect that of the black British and American aesthetic that they emulated. This group in turn uses rap music and hip hop culture as a means to define a space within the larger UK society in which they can re-define themselves. An interesting point to consider, however, is how their experiences would differ if they no longer chose to participate in rap or to socialize with blacks.

B. Blackness as Currency

A nationally known popular culture figure, Ali G, has parodied the "wigger" character in a series of shows for British television's Channel 4. He is of an ambiguous Asian or possibly Middle Eastern descent with a goatee, skull cap [tight fitting hat made of satin or another stretch material with no bill], colorful over-sized shirt and pants that are supposed to represent hip hop clothes. The G is taken from hip hop speech and is most likely meant to stand for gangsta (gangster). The use of hip hop clothing and speech as well as his unorthodox interview style is supposed to represent the fact that he is from the street. He appears ignorant of the normal ways of asking questions and interacting with people. He sarcastically asks well

known people in British society, such as politicians, questions during a taped sit down question and answer session. The guests are surprised by his candor, wit and frankness and they usually take offense or have difficulty deciding whether the questions are serious or not.

Ali G's appeal is that he speaks in black street slang mixed with a thick British accent. The strength of the British accent is strategically emphasized to show that the black accent is constructed. The slippages into British talk can represent two things. To begin with, it shows that he is truly British despite the black slips. Second, it is meant to parody the way that many white British youth are trying to talk "black" and act tough when in truth they are British and not from rough areas. Black and white, British and foreign are juxtaposed and the viewing audience is expected to be able to discern the correct way for British youth to act and speak. All of this is done by an "immigrant" thus making the argument stronger. After all, if an immigrant can see how ridiculous it is for people who are not black to speak this way, then those that have a "natural" right to Britain, read whites, should be able to see this even more quickly.

In real life, the person who plays Ali G, Sacha Baron

Cohen, is a graduate of Oxford. Little of his background is known because he does not give interviews. However, much of the television public believes he is funny and his show attracts a large audience. He recently appeared in a Madonna music video for the song *Music*. It features Madonna with a gold tooth and thick gold chains singing over a hip hop inspired backing track. There seems to be an attraction involved in "acting black" that makes its portrayal humorous, acceptable and profitable when done by elites as well as blacks.

An interesting example of white involvement in rap on a national as well as local level is the Radio 1 dee jay and well known rap figurehead, Tim Westwood. He has been involved in rap in London since its early days in the mid 1980s. Westwood has earned both respect for his endurance in rap in the UK as well disdain for his support of US rap at the expense of British rap.

The events that he holds regularly attract a predominantly black working class youth audience showing that for some, especially teenagers, color is not an issue, as long as he plays the most current and freshest music. He is also well known for his on-air persona which combines recent rap slang terms and vocabulary presented in a unique

combination of Jamaican patois filtered through a UK middle class accent with a US inflection added for emphasis. The catch phrases of "yeah man," and terms like "mans dem" [a group of males], slang terms associated with black youth, are constants in his lexicon. Ironically, I was told that many listeners do not realize that Tim Westwood is white. A writer from the British publication *New Statesman* became disturbed by the fact that "he [Westwood] seems like a white man who feels he has to be black" (Cook 1999). It is not clear whether this writer is uncomfortable with the fact that Westwood "acts black" or whether Westwood's persona brings attention to the varied ways that whiteness is created and lived.

The month before I left London (July 1999), Westwood was involved in an altercation in which he was shot after dee jaying at an event in South London. The press reports that followed the incident explored Westwood's background and tendency to regularly play the "thug"⁵ type of rap music on his radio show. Ultimately, it was suggested by the press and others in the rap community that he brought this type of violent incident on himself by playing "aggressive"

⁵ Thug rap is rap that is based on an outlaw character. The thug character is supposed to have little regard for the feelings of others or the law.

music. Here, the link between the content of the music, the audience and the resultant behavior was heavily codified as discussions portrayed rap as primarily a black art form that had somehow infiltrated sections of the white community. Referring to the wider influence of rap music on the general society, one writer from the Daily Mail newspaper stated,

Make no mistake, this is not just a problem with inner city black youth; you can hear aggressive rap in pubs, shops and clubs across Britain (Daily Mail July 21, 1999).

What the Westwood incident uncovered to wider audiences is the way that rap music and hip hop culture give white people a means to challenge, or attempt to temporally transcend, whiteness. Westwood holds one of the largest gatherings at Notting Hill Carnival⁶. It is reported that while playing in front of a large crowd a few years ago, he told all the white people to move to the back and all his black "brothers" to come to the front of the stage (Observer July 29, 1999). It is significant that a white person who has aligned himself with black culture feels comfortable enough to make this kind of gesture at one of the country's largest gathering of black people.

⁶ For an interesting look at the racial aspects of Notting Hill Carnival see Gutzmore (1993).

Apparently, his request did not invoke protest from either blacks or whites. His comment does however show around whom and in what context Westwood feels comfortable.

Tim Westwood seems to be critiquing his ascribed whiteness by using the currency of black culture to appear to express solidarity with black people. In addition, blackness operates as a type of commodity that has become detached from a racial base and which in turn can be acquired and practiced. Through his involvement in rap, blackness becomes a caché which allows Westwood to believe that he is accepted in the black community, especially in what he perceives as the inner city black community, in the UK. This is similar to the idea forwarded by Thornton in her thesis that "hipness", which in the context of my research is equivalent to blackness, can be seen as a type of subcultural capital that gives individuals a form of caché that inflates their status among peers (Thornton 1995). A similar phenomenon has occurred in Japan among some Japanese youth who have undergone tanning treatments, grown afros and dread locks hairstyles in the attempt to physically and culturally emulate African Americans (Wood 1991). This is but one form of "entrance" into the hip hop culture. Ultimately, this group's participation in hip hop

challenges ideas of identity as defined by wider Japanese society (Condry 2000).

An interesting outcome of Westwood's shooting was the focus on his illusive background, which had not been widely publicized in the past, as he is aggressively guarded about his private life. It was revealed that he grew up the son of an Anglican bishop in a series of rectories outside of London. This background is far from the music that he chooses to play or the rap persona that he projects. This is very reflective of the issue of class as it manifests in rap more generally. Many performers and personalities do not come from the working class background that they present, nor do they commit the acts that they discuss in their music. The resulting parody and hyperbole are sometimes extremely difficult for general consumers of rap to comprehend.

Interestingly, my white working class informants' backgrounds are blatantly different from that of Westwood, as they grew up around black people in the inner city. I attempted to interview Tim Westwood twice. I contacted him first by mail and I was sent a refusal by his office. The second time, I met him during the taping of his radio show at Radio 1. I was with 1998 DMC Champion DJ Craze and DJ

Develop. At the time, he told me that he would later participate in an interview. When I contacted his office, I got no response after approximately eight attempts.

C. "Boundaries" of Contact

The ethnographic examples in this chapter usefully bring the issues of appropriation and processes of cultural interaction to the fore. However, while doing so, the focus can unfortunately become centered on the emotive, audible or visual aspects of these interactions as expressed in cultural practices associated with black people. At times, this obscures issues of power involved in the creation and dissemination of popular culture and skews the direction of the discourse to focus on essentialized aspects of black culture that are useful to and utilized by white youth. As Simon Frith (1992) states in his critique of fellow theorists of music and culture,

The myth of the "natural" African is read onto African and Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean musical expression. The white pop, cultural studies obsession with black music (particularly noticeable in Britain) is thus an expression of a yearning for a "natural" (unbourgeois, uncivilized) state of grace (Frith 1992:181).

In addition, by referring to practices found in black music, the authors reify the categories of race from which

they attempt to distance themselves. Race becomes a category that somehow exists rather than a category that is constructed. Black culture is treated as fixed, reduced to a set of behaviors and ideas.

My study examines the interplay between groups who see themselves as part of the same rap community; rap is not seen or practiced by whites in a context separate from blacks. Unlike reggae, rap is understood by most of my informants as a universal cultural form, and this has profound effects on how it is appropriated.

Traditionally known as protest music, reggae has further diversified to produce ragga music. Yet, although, this music and culture have had a huge impact on Jamaican youth in London and other parts of the diaspora, several factors make it less accessible to whites. To begin with, the use of patois renders some of the lyrics difficult for those who do not speak it or have not grown up around it to understand. The Jamaican accent, slang, and the aesthetics associated with the dance hall, as well as the association in the popular imagination of dance hall music with homophobia, misogyny and the "ghetto", distance this form of reggae from a more general audience.

In addition, in "roots" reggae, which is another form

of reggae, ideas of redemption and homeland are pronounced. Related musical themes revolve around West Indian/black nationalism and a politics that critique repressive colonizing societies otherwise known as Babylon. The political messages that are found in this type of reggae are directed at specific experiences tied to racial and religious identity, geographical movement and experiences within the African diaspora. This is heard in music from artists such as the late Garnet Silk, Sizzla, and Luciano. Whites are not totally excluded from such musics as many have been involved with this music for extended periods of time. However, such involvement has not translated into participation by mainstream white audiences. In turn, the appropriation of ideas and styles of reggae by whites is not actively done in the presence of blacks as part of the same reggae community. Notable exceptions to this are the prominence of white British reggae dee jay, David Radigan and the release of music by the UK reggae/pop group UB40. However, such groups are not widespread and inter-racial contact in reggae is not as pervasive as it is in rap. The rap community interacts more noticeably as a bi-racial group. The remainder of the chapter extends the analysis of white's involvement in

black culture beyond ideas of appropriation to illustrate how black culture becomes a part of the cultural makeup of white youth.

The inter-personal relationships between whites and blacks in rap represent relations that are in many ways opposed to those found in wider UK society. They differ from UK society in that relations between people of African and European descent do not always correspond to socially created categories based on race. Instead, for the informants, rap represents a cultural rather than a racial identity. Herein lies the fluid nature of race, class and popular culture more generally. In many ways, to be a member of this community means that one is a member of a wider cultural identity that stands in opposition to dominant British society's concepts of race, culture and community. Despite this perceived solidarity, however, within this community there are indications of resentment on the part of some blacks that reveal the points of unity and disintegration.

The issue of whiteness was critiqued by my white informants. Although they are seen as operating outside of a normative mainstream whiteness, their class position was called into question by their involvement in rap. For the

white informants, their access to recording contracts and concert performances problematized the usual assumptions regarding what it meant to be white working class. They were poor, but had access to resources and contacts that other working class whites did not. They also differed from other working class whites in that they occupied a visible position in a rap community that was associated with a black working class experience in the popular imagination.

On the whole, my white informants had access to forms of travel, income and sponsorship as a result of participating in a musical tour of the UK. I did not see the same access to income and travel in other working class groups. Unlike the blacks in the study, these whites are more likely to have a wider exposure to other white artists who may help them record, produce and distribute their music. Steven, for example, has access to a series of musical networks and in turn is in a position to distribute the music to a larger audience. As a result, Steven has been able to go on tour with Fred and Charles. During the period of my fieldwork, Fred and Charles's group Task Force gained notoriety through the album *New Mic Order* and the tour of the UK that supported this album. Steven had several guest appearances on this album as well as several

other records that have been well received by the rap community. Therefore, he has the opportunity to sell more records and perform for larger audiences because he has access to these networks. This is facilitated by the way in which he and his group relate to the wider society outside of the working class setting. The way that this group is treated by people outside the working class is a key to their success. While this group might feel alienated from British society, they have outlets that blacks may not.

Part of this access was due to the fact that this group of informants were talented rappers. Yet whiteness could also be marketed as a selling point. In a country with a predominantly white population, it is easier to market white rappers to white audiences. My white informants were aware of this potential and did not want their whiteness to influence their sales. According to them, most of the fans at their performances were white. The informants did not want to gain success solely due to their race nor did they want fans that were not familiar with or involved in rap and hip hop culture. They too conflated rap with blackness. An interesting point here is the constant definition of boundaries between them and other working class whites and middle class whites. They

presented themselves as a different type of white person, one who had grown up around blacks, talked like blacks and in some cases were involved in or had had relationships with black women. To them, blackness took on a symbolic and lived aspect that they felt they experienced.

The majority of the whites that I interviewed did not see their participation in rap as an appropriation of a black cultural form. Instead, it was characterized as a localization of rap that centers on the exhibition of verbal skill, dexterity, wit and knowledge of rap and hip hop's history. In this setting, individuals were able to "do" rap or not based on sometimes arbitrary criteria set up by the peer group that did not correspond to race. Here, black culture became a part of their cultural make-up as a result of close inter-personal contact and choice. Rather than a random occurrence, these white working class informants made a conscious decision to affiliate themselves with black British and black American culture, finding in it an identity alternative to that of being British.

They are differentiated on a class and racial level from general UK society because they are poor and because they actively choose to incorporate black British and black

American culture into their lives. Other working and middle class whites see them as "acting black." Blacks see them as having a social standing that is somewhat closer to working class blacks than to mainstream middle class white people. In all, the whites in question comprise an in-between category of identity that exists out of choice and circumstance.

Familiar with a particular urban experience that is codified here as "black", these whites have grown up around blacks in the same estates and neighborhoods, listened to the same music and occupied a similar class position. More than merely "white Negroes"⁷ (Mailer 1957), my informants use black culture as their main point of cultural reference. However, as a black informant perceptively pointed out to me "...this is what they choose to identify with." The idea of choice in terms of who to spend time with and what forms of popular culture they choose to practice is crucial in evaluating how and why some whites practice rap. It is important to see these informants as actors who make conscious decisions to align themselves with particular groups and cultural movements. My research

⁷ Norman Mailer popularized this term in relation to whites that voyeuristically sought out and participated in aspects of black culture.

attempted to anchor these choices by examining the factors that influence them as well as viewing the outcome within the context of rap.

Not all whites in rap incorporate black culture to the same degree. The whites I encountered came from different class and cultural backgrounds that played a role in their participation in rap music. They did not represent the experiences of all working class white youth, as the white working class in Britain is a highly differentiated group in terms of experiences and attitudes about race. Large segments of the white working class have had little to do with blacks and are suspicious of black culture. The incidence of hooliganism in the form of racial taunts aimed at black players and fans at football (soccer) matches is an example of one form of working class racism directed at blacks.

Steven, the white reality rapper, confirmed the incidence of white working class racism when he said that at one time he lived in "the most racist estate in north London." Here, racial prejudice was directed at his black friends who visited him at his flat. He eventually moved from this estate as he was unable to deal with the physical confrontations that regularly occurred. In their attempt to

negotiate race and class whites like Steven must constantly deal with inter and intra race and class issues. This chapter has addressed how white rappers engage in the process of white identity creation (Frankenberg 1997). It has offered a window onto the complexity and shifts in rap and racial categories as well as some of the circumstances affecting whites in the inner city.

Rather than merely reflecting cultural exchanges that occur out of close residential proximity and contact, the white rappers display an element of choice when creating their identity in a multicultural setting that problematizes smooth formulations of hybrid interaction. Fred's comments especially point to the fact that this group is aware of the response that their involvement and exposure to black culture elicits. He focuses on markers of identity such as dress and language as ways that involvement in rap distinguishes him from the general society. This brings attention to the fact that blackness is a way for these groups to act out racial or masculine tendencies that they are not able to do as white youth or through cultural forms that are strictly associated with white popular culture.

CONCLUSION

Research on any topic allows one to look at pertinent issues while opening the door to others that become more salient as the project progresses. Rap is about music, but it also addresses issues of culture and artistic expression, as well as matters related to race and class. Although rap music and hip hop culture are global phenomena, in the minds of many, the roots of rap are still associated with black American and Latino youth. Discussions of the relationship between race, class and popular culture tend to deflect attention from the origins of music, but rap as a genre has a very clear historical development that is tied to particular narratives and to the type of expression that is produced in marginalized environs. Rap music and hip hop culture must be looked at within this wider social context. Not to consider this is a significant oversight. The way that hip hop historically became an inclusive culture, able to incorporate varied racial and class elements, confounds any smooth analysis of how and why different groups create the music and participate in the culture. For some, rap is a passing

trend while for others it is a necessary part of their lives.

Throughout the research, my informants negotiated race and class in very unique ways. The nature of race and class called into question what it meant to be black, white, Asian and working class in the multicultural setting of London. Furthermore, the study of rap made me take a closer look at what rap music and hip hop culture entailed. Were they based on commercial success or participation and involvement? What role did race and class play in their development and practice? In any case, the involvement of blacks in rap illustrates that the racial and class stakes in the practice of popular culture remain high in both non-mainstream and mainstream contexts. The specificities of how this is negotiated in London are unique to the city's racial and class dynamic and overall multicultural image.

Rap and Hybridity

Rap music has always been hybrid in nature and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. From its beginnings in the Bronx, hip hop dee jays played records from America, Europe, Africa and Asia so as to create an expressive music. Dancers appropriated moves from the Congo

and Brazil into their routines. In local neighborhoods, hip hop absorbed influences from West Indian and African American culture into its very vocabulary. Rap music is organic and as it moves it soaks up influences from its surroundings. This is not lost on the rap community in London.

In London, diverse influences are absorbed widely by rappers in developing a style that draws on their own cultural backgrounds. Thus much of London rap reflects the rappers' experiences and neighborhood affiliations. In addition, some feel close to or use the culture of the US as they experience rap. The idea here is that the rappers are involved in a process of cultural creation that is not passive or random, but is specific to particular circumstances.

The inclusive nature of rap's practice makes it a culture that is accessible to many and open to interpretation. Within this process, however, lines are drawn and certain behaviors are monitored. Attention is paid to boundaries and people know where they can go, with whom and when. This is illustrated in the various inter- and intra-racial and class alliances that make up the London rap scene as well as the split in the wider rap community.

If we are to talk of rap, and popular culture more generally, as a way to synthesize the cultural backgrounds of different groups, we must be specific or we run the risk of labeling as "hybrid" any interaction between groups that have been socially defined as separate races or cultures.

UK scholars Back (1996), Bhabba (1994;1988) and Gilroy (2000) have done an excellent job in recognizing some of the cultural processes that arise in London's multicultural milieu. They engage in discussions of hybrid cultures that come out of the interaction between different cultures. In cosmopolitan places such as London this is not merely a one way transaction; instead, groups influence each other. The resulting hybrid identity is one that both incorporates and calls into question the unequal relationship between cultural groups that were at one time considered inferior [foreign] and others that were considered superior [British]. According to these scholars, new cultures and identities are made out of this interaction. Gilroy (2000) sees these new formations and alliances in cosmopolitan cities as enabling a progression towards doing away with pre-existing racial and cultural categories. He states,

... We lack an adequate language for comprehending mixture outside of jeopardy and catastrophe. Finding this valuable new idiom does not require merely inverting the polarity of hybridity's internal

circuits so that what was previously seen in terms of loss, dilution, and weakness becomes valuable instead and offers an opportunity to celebrate the vigorous cosmopolitanism endowed in modernity by transgressive and creative contacts with different people. Perhaps, pending a more complex organicity that comprehends difference in the forms of interarticulation and unremarkable interdependence suggested by symbiosis, we might begin to comprehend what is still best named "transcultural" mixture, and the assumptions about alterity that it promotes, as phenomena without any necessary or fixed value at all (Gilroy 2000:217).

While Gilroy's analysis is extremely thought-provoking and usefully addresses the cultural processes at work in London, my findings suggest the need for a continued analysis of how race and class impact the lives of blacks and working class groups in relation to the creation of identities and cultures. In my view, there are different experiences in relation to hybridity. I have discussed some of these racial and class identities in previous chapters. To discuss hybridity as a singular process is difficult because such an analysis does not seem to address the way that different racial and class groups are included in this process. A key point in the research viewed the way that people involved in rap interacted as rap was created under specific conditions that revolved around a politics of everyday choice. The research treated these choices as key windows into the relationships between people in the

community. When rap is examined in this way, ideas of choice, autonomy and power become integral aspects of cultural interaction--something that the concept "hybridity" does not quite capture.

The melding of cultures in a syncretic process is an obvious product of population shifts, histories and social conditions. Culture has never been bounded, but analyses of culture have. The contribution of the hybridity concept is that it unpacks sealed units such as race and culture to show how these terms are constructed and fluid. The "logical" end to this is a creolized culture. In Hannerz's view, a creole culture is "of mixed origin, rather than historically pure and homogeneous (Hannerz 1997:127).

My research attempts to go a step further, however, to view how this process is being lived by the working class and how they incorporate ideas of hybridity into their everyday existence. Are my informants experiencing the hybrid creation of culture or the latest shift in race and class politics that stresses mixture in certain parts of the cultural realm? What is at stake in hybrid interactions? The point here is to explore the uses and limits of the concept of hybridity in a larger political and social perspective rather than categorically dismiss

the concept.

My informants are involved in the active creation of popular culture, yet their narratives spoke of a sense of uneasiness with the new identities that are being constructed. Initially, it appeared as though the process of cultural interaction was smooth, but upon further examination, the outcomes of this were far from de-politicized due to the dynamics of power related to racial and class positions. Through ethnographic accounts, I tried to portray this uneasiness and responses to it.

In the context of my research, people of different backgrounds were forced to live together with little access to resources. Inevitably, they worked out ways to co-exist, but this seemed to be multiculturalism by default. Informants explained this to me by saying that "we've always grown up around others". Here the everyday exchanges between people of different racial groups were not uniform and led to contradictions that necessitated a further analysis concerning how alliances in the rap community were or were not built. For example, ideas of race and ethnicity were discussed to be situational and fluid depending on who was present in a given scenario. In addition, informants' differing levels of access to resources problematized the

issue of class and what it meant to be working class.

Hybridity describes some but not all of a complicated process involved in the maintenance of style, space and interactions in the rap community. The concept of hybridity is useful in describing the process by which hip hop culture was developed by incorporating different elements of musical influence across periods, geographical boundaries and people. But the way in which hybridity is practiced is less clear. The examination of processes of cultural hybridity and the lived experience of multiculturalism led me to ask more questions concerning additional ways to discuss the interactions found in rap in London and in multicultural places more generally.

In the UK, a popular way for people from immigrant backgrounds to describe their nationality is to describe themselves as British but...meaning that they are British by birth but retain some form of awareness or practice of their immigrant backgrounds. For some, the hesitance to identify as British stems from the unwillingness of British society, especially outside of more diverse places like London, to accept them. Mainstream Britain attributes "outsider cultures" to urban culture produced by black working class people. This culture is "foreign" until it

becomes widely accepted by the mainstream. The response to this by some blacks has been to create new forms of music while acknowledging their Britishness, perhaps, but disassociating themselves from any wider nationalistic project. I believe that practices such as rap are used by informants to define themselves as British but yet an alternative type of Briton.

Cultural Interaction and Race

Interestingly, ideas of cultural interaction exist alongside an enduring attitude of racism. This creates a contradictory situation whereby different groups come together to "create" culture while at the same time blacks must deal with the racism of British society. The Steven Lawrence case shows another side of multicultural London that calls into question the state of race relations and cultural literacy in the city. On April 22, 1993 Steven Lawrence was stabbed to death by several white youths in Eltham, in southeast London, while standing at a bus stop with a friend. The crime scene was not properly monitored by the London police, leads were not followed up and the crime went unsolved for six years. A government-sponsored inquiry was then undertaken to discuss the case, the

conduct of the police and the efficacy of the justice system. At the inquiry, questions surfaced about the police's procedures and intentions. The police had not pursued tips given to them about who the murderers were. They did not utilize a police video of one of the defendants disposing of a bag of clothes soon after the murder even though it was assumed that he was throwing away clothes that had Lawrence's blood on them.

The trial brought race relations to a head in London. The end result was the now well-known McPherson Report. The main finding of the 335-page document was an acknowledgement of institutionalized racism in British society. In criticizing the actions of the Metropolitan Police institutionalized racism was defined as

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amounts to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people (Guardian February 24, 1999).

The term "institutionalized racism" provoked a reaction from various strata in British society. Seen as being politically correct (pc), the definition and admission of institutional racism was argued to limit the police's ability to do their job. In this scenario, police

are hindered from performing their duties for fear of being labeled racist when these duties involve minority citizens. Such an analysis moves the target of criticism from the actions that are perpetrated by racists to the people who are protesting these actions. In turn, the problem is not racism but those that are hyper sensitive to what might be prematurely viewed as racist activities. Here, racism is not the problem; instead political correctness is. One writer from a London based newspaper sums this up as he states that a problem lies

In the growing culture of paperwork and political correctness. This condition, unlike racism, really is 'institutional.' The number of people who have actually experienced police racism is almost certainly smaller than the number who have suffered from crimes while local policeman were attending racism awareness courses (quoted in Kundnami 2000:10).

This illustrates the difficulty which people in mainstream audiences have in addressing the salience of race in UK society. Critiques of racist behaviors and policies as they impact the lives of black people are routinely avoided.

The Lawrence case put race into the local and national spotlight in a way that it had not been since a similar report, the Scarman Report, looked into the causes of racial antagonism after the Brixton uprising in the 1980s. One outcome of the Lawrence case was the creation of the

Stephen Lawrence Memorial Scholarship. Prince Charles presided over a ceremony that acknowledged this award. The scholarship was dedicated to increasing the numbers of architects from ethnic minorities. While piecemeal in the opinion of many, this did put race in the national news and imagination. It could be seen as an admission by one of the most well-known figures in British society that race and racism are critical issues. Unfortunately, in his public statement, Prince Charles focused on new designs in architecture rather than the events and circumstances that precipitated the need for the scholarship. This may be seen as symptomatic of British race relations in which racial discrimination is not commonly addressed. In this context, my research raises questions about how race and racism are addressed in hybrid interactions.

Rap Styles

Depending on where one goes in London, the rap community almost always looks very multicultural. To say that rap is a solely black phenomena belies the fact that other groups are heavily involved in the creation and practice of rap. Blacks in this country and elsewhere, however, have a particular relationship to rap that is very

telling of rap's relation to the wider issues of race and class. On one level, regardless of racial and class identity, the practice of rap creates similarity and difference among the communities involved. But if rappers in London are any indication, there are several ways to pursue this. I observed styles of British accented rapping with a strong inflection of Jamaican patois and reggae toasting, delivery and slang, as well as styles rapped in a more uniform London cockney accent. This was not always dictated by race. For example, some people from Jamaican parentage rapped with a Jamaican influenced style, but whites who had been brought up around blacks also used this style. Regardless of style, for both groups, rap was thought of as an urban or street based culture.

These rap styles are unique products of particular cities, neighborhoods and experiences. This precludes an easy formulation of the relationship between the local and global. While glocalization (Robertson 1995) describes some of this, an analysis of rap in London benefits from asking how race and class affect the practice of localizing culture. For example, the US influence on London rap is sometimes met with ambivalence and sometimes scorn. A simple point to keep in mind when viewing this relationship

is the issue of language use and acquisition. Unlike non-English speaking rappers, Londoners rap in English. Naturally, this invites comparison to US rap which is globally the most hegemonic form of rap. In fact, American music is so pervasive in Europe that in the 1990s France passed a law requiring 40 percent French content on French radio. Consequently, rap in France enjoyed increasing success. Besides language and vocabulary, musical structure and subject matter are heavily influenced by American rap throughout the world. People are critical of US rap's celebration of materialism, but continue to be influenced by it as a genre.

The way that people practice rap is an adaptation to and reflection of their environment. Therefore, despite the influence of the US, rap in different places sounds diverse in terms of lyrics, accents, samples used and production techniques. For many, rap is a key idiom for communication and self-expression. My informants entered this process at different points. For blacks in the study, rap gave them a culture through which to address their own Britishness, class and racial identities by seeing similarities in the experience of racism between blacks in the UK and US. The US remains a source of cultural, political and economic

influence to many blacks in Britain. Working class whites tapped into the same ideas of marginalization, believing that they too had experienced analogous social conditions to blacks in the UK and to a degree the US.

Race and Class Politics in Rap

Blacks in the study acknowledged the presence of people of African descent in the creation of rap in the UK and US while concurrently recognizing the participation of other groups. As a result, however, they were caught in a paradox and one that was also found more widely in British society concerning race--how to address the centrality of the black presence in rap while incorporating the influence of other groups. This dilemma was not always expressed in a confrontational manner. In fact, I view this as an underlying issue in the research that came out only in private or indirectly.

My research illustrates that blacks do not practice rap based on primordial characteristics of race. My examination of rap, race and class is not based on biologized definitions of verbal, writing or performing ability. Instead, I look at the way that racial and class categories are created and practiced according to social

context. There is a plurality of racial and class experiences that do not neatly align themselves. However, this does not mean that groups do not undergo similar processes that create racial categories. Postcolonial movements have generated large scale population shifts, but cultural, political and economic marginalization persists. Therefore, research on rap and hip hop culture more generally must deal with the way in which culture is actively created and practiced in such conditions and how racial identity and class play into this.

The research does not employ reified notions of cultures as sealed and bounded entities, nor does it essentialize ideas of race. I realize that there is a great deal of mixture and contact within the context of popular culture and this became apparent during the research. However, at the current time, the underground rap community in London is experiencing a split along racial and class lines. One informant described the racial gap in the community as "frightening".

The social worlds have been explored in the preceding chapters. One is a multi-cultural body comprised of people of African and European descent from working class backgrounds. Within the multi-racial rap community in

London, rap significantly obscures racial differences allowing fundamental issues of race and class to percolate without being openly addressed or debated. This community attempts to rap in and support London based styles. The other community is comprised primarily of people of European descent from middle class backgrounds. In the middle class community, participation in rap is linked to certain venues that cater to "old school" rap musical and dress styles. In addition, a large segment of the middle class community favors non commercial US rap. The fact that these rap groups have not found commercial success in the US adds to their legitimacy and worth as authentic rappers. My multi-cultural informants consider white middle class participants in rap to be more consumers of rap music and hip hop culture nostalgia.

The practice of rap in London by blacks can be seen as part of a larger popular cultural legacy found throughout the diaspora. For example, one finds commonalities in the vocal art of mc'ing, the prominence given to the dee jay as the focal point of expressive culture and stylistic continuities of rapping and toasting which cut across both hip hop and reggae culture. In addition, the development of rap serves as a potential way to identify with a wider rap

community. Through rap, members of the rap community can express solidarity with others who create and develop rap throughout the African diaspora, despite the fact that these groups do not reside in close geographical proximity to each other. It is in this historical and social context that London rap music and hip hop became an increasingly viable cultural form for blacks. Since its inception, hip hop culture has maintained an influence on black Britons as well as other disenfranchised populations found in the white and Asian communities. It is the points of contention that arise during the process of defining and maintaining racial and cultural categories, inside and outside the realm of rap, that have become important to participants in London and the UK.

The way in which blacks are racialized and their responses to these processes remain fertile areas for research. Rap music and hip hop culture remain ways for marginalized groups to address their concerns. Rap music and hip hop culture are ways of life that allow disenfranchised people to pursue something productive in the future. In this sense, the class and racial aspects of rap's development become clear. For my informants, rap is one step to perhaps addressing their marginalization

through the building of interpersonal relationships and attempts at entrepreneurship.

I have used examples from my own fieldwork to discuss the movement of rap. The global processes that facilitate this movement are similar to those that are involved in the movement of other forms of culture. Unlike other popular culture forms, however, a distinct culture has emerged that links the various satellites of hip hop culture. Rap is received and utilized by various groups in different ways. In London, rap does two things. On the one hand, it serves as a forum for cultural creation, practice and expression for different racial and class elements. On the other hand, it is a means by which people of African descent in the UK express a cultural connection between the UK and other places. The manipulation of signs, symbols, messages and the practices of rap thus create a wider "imagined" (rap and hip hop) community (Anderson 1983). This imagining develops into a situation whereby rap and hip hop can serve as tools for communication and cultural practice between different populations. For example, my informants were able to use rap as a medium to "fit in" when they visited the US and other places.

In many ways, the spread of rap de-centers the

movement of culture from the US to include divergent locales within the diaspora. People who practice rap are inserted into different networks that do not emanate from a US center. For many populations, the US is a destination realized through media rather than actual physical presence. Put somewhat differently, the links borne out of rap are practiced along a different axis than merely a "US and other" area formulation. This is the case, for example with one of South Africa's most well known rap groups, Prophets of Da City. I spoke with Shaheem, one of the members of the group, while in London. He told me that when they grew up they were as familiar with the pioneers of UK rap as those of the US. Throughout his long career of involvement in hip hop, he has developed networks of personal relations in both countries.

Shaheem related some of the specificities of South African rap. He stated that it was difficult for his group in South Africa to obtain records from the UK and the US, which is also the case with rap in places such as Cuba. Like rap in other parts of the world, rap in Cape Town has absorbed several of the dialects from the surrounding areas as well as the local slang which constantly changes. The messages in their music reflect their experiences growing

up in a post-apartheid regime. In many cases, Da Prophets use rap as a tool for communication with youth as they perform for groups throughout South Africa as well as traveling to prisons.

I include an example of South African rap to illustrate that the movement of rap and hip hop takes other paths than solely from the US to UK. Other circulation patterns exist within the black diaspora. In addition, as I stress throughout, the movement of rap is accompanied by the movement of ideas that create local dialogue between rap artists. Indeed, the axis of diasporic relations should be extended beyond the US to include the remainder of Europe, Africa, especially West Africa and networks that have developed between French and francophone rap in Senegal, as well as the presence of rap in the Caribbean and in South America (Wade 1999). This reveals anything but a linear flow of culture, lyrics, ideas and people from a solely a "US and other" perspective.

The movement and spread of rap must not be seen as a one to one relationship between satellites. Here, the research points to a relationship between groups that must be examined on different levels invoking the now ubiquitous relationship of the global and local. Rap exists

simultaneously on the international, national and neighborhood level. The analysis of globalization needs to understand the way in which these different levels of appropriation influence the way that rap is practiced.

Futures

Rap and hip hop culture are open to interpretation by their participants. The movement of rap makes it no less authentic, but instead strengthens its appeal and inventiveness. On a global scale, rap has diversified to have a presence in much of the world and it is no longer seen as an exclusively black cultural form. However, it should not be forgotten that in a global sense it is blacks who remain at the forefront of the production and imagery of the music. Inevitably, there is an underlying tension between this and the increasing presence of non-blacks in rap and the continued diversification of rap music and hip hop culture.

Rap continues to grow on a global scale because there has been incorporation outside of its local origins. Ironically, despite London's reputation as a multicultural stronghold, some blacks in London saw the spread of rap as encroaching on "their" culture, whereas others saw it as a

healthy growth. The question remains--what will rap communities look and sound like in ten or even twenty years and how will issues of race and class be implicated in them?

The growth of rap sheds light on another set of events that are happening. The currents of creativity among working class blacks are at work somewhere producing some new form of music and possibly popular culture. I had a conversation with one of my informants, Albert, about this topic. He was skeptical that any new forms of music would be created in the upcoming years and believed that creativity within the black community has been pushed to its limits. His view is based on his experiences as someone who follows popular culture as a writer and artist. He said that he has not heard any new musical forms in the last few years and does not expect to. I respect his opinion, but I disagree. People who create culture do not make themselves apparent at convenient times or in conventional places, nor has cultural production come in a pre-packaged form. Musics become cultures without an orchestrated plan.

Rap has fostered some of the most interesting and vibrant cultural products of the last twenty five years. The circuits of movement between black London and black

America, especially New York, are as fluid as ever. In addition, the links between Europe, Africa, the US and the West Indies, mainly Jamaica, remain some of the sources of creativity in the works of many black British artists. An example of this was seen in the prevalence of the Jamaican sound system used in the expressive culture of Jamaican immigrants to London and New York. The sound system would go on to influence rap and other popular cultural forms in London and New York. In the UK, the move from reggae to hip hop landed black Briton in familiar cultural territory. The similarities between "chatting" lyrics in a sound system and rapping lyrics are analagous. The current crop of black British mcs know this. They also know how the reggae sound system went on to influence, through a mix of reggae, rap and electronica, the creation of jungle. Many jungle mcs grew up in the context of sound system culture and had their start as chatters or rappers (Noys 1995).

To discuss these movements, we must move away from evaluating popular culture in ways that rely on geographical boundaries and distinctions of genre. The influence of one rap community on another does not exist in linear, temporal or geographic tracks. For example, I have discussed the connections in rap between the US and UK. In

addition to this, UK rappers in the early 1990s influenced black rappers in Amsterdam through performance (Samsone 1994:180). More recently, rappers in New Zealand came to the UK to meet with conscious rappers to exchange ideas concerning rap (Hapeta 2000:3). Conscious rappers attempt to bring wider attention to cultural, social or political issues through their music. The movement of rap and the cultural productions that come out of this require a re-thinking of the idea of geographic boundaries and the way in which ideas of race and culture are implicated.

The idea of movement brings up another critical issue. In the course of the research I observed that rap and other forms of popular culture were being transported between locations by non-elites. Many of my informants passed rap along via networks of friends, family and other interpersonal relations. This illustrates that the creation and movement of culture operates for both elites and non-elites. Doobie and Albert, informants from chapter four, show that such movement includes people without wide scale access to resources. The movement of culture in this way is not a random occurrence, but is part of a much longer process of cultural transfer at work between working class diasporic populations. An outgrowth of this movement is the

emergence of the mid-Atlantic phenomenon of cultural creation. This combines dialect, slang, music making practices and personnel from the UK and the US into a single musical product, further complicating the category and definition of black and British. Such formations will continue to surface out of this working class cosmopolitanism, especially with blacks in the UK and in other places.

Conclusion

Culture passes among people through personal and technological networks. I believe that the way in which rap moves has much to do with its effectiveness as an expression of certain experiences--experiences of marginalization that have been shared by black populations, as well as other groups who see themselves as outside the mainstream understanding of race and class in their society. I do not see it as a coincidence that rap is the voice of disenfranchised groups throughout the world. Groups whose members are racialized as black remain near the bottom of the usual indicators of success regardless of where they live. Is it surprising that music associated with them would be popular with the marginalized majority

throughout the world? "Black" remains a fluid category that relies less on biology and more on the common conditions that come out of this position. Rap is important, but is but one of many responses to these conditions.

The idea of borrowing brings attention to the main contrast in all of this. Through imagined and literal links, blacks in this study borrow influences from black America. At the same time, they are trying to define a culture that is black and British. What this will become is unclear, but mediums such as rap music and hip hop culture are part of the process of self definition as people negotiate the vastly unequal racial and class structures in which they find themselves. Racial and class discrimination continue to be persistent reminders that although these categories are socially constructed their distinct realities persist and must be dealt with in the political and cultural realm. This includes an analysis of the ways that working class blacks are and are not incorporated within processes of hybridity and cultural interaction. As we have seen, the possibilities thus created are at once provocative with new possibilities and highly problematic— in both cases indicative of how London and the UK address

rap, race and class.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abu-Lughod, Lila

1990 The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women. *American Ethnologist* 17(1): 41-55.

Adorno, Theodore W.

1982 On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening. In *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Andrew Arato and Eike Gedhart, eds. Pp. 270-299. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Alexander, Claire

1996 *The Art of Being Black: The Creation of Black British Youth Identities*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin

2001 *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain*. London: Routledge.

Anderson, Benedict

1983 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Appadurai, Arjun

1996 *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

1990 Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Public Culture* 2(2): 1-24.

Appiah, Anthony

1992 *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Asad, Talal

1990 Multiculturalism and British Identity in the Wake of the Rushdie Affair. *Politics & Society* 18(4): 455-480.

Back, Les

1996 *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture: Racisms and Multiculture in Young Lives*. London: University College London Press.

1988 *Coughing Up Fire: Sound Systems in South-East London*. *New Formations* 5: 141-52.

Baker, Houston A., Diawara, Manthia and Lindeborg, Ruth
Eds

1996 *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Balibar, Etienne and Wallerstein, Emmanuel, Eds

1991 *Is There a Neo Racism? In Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. Etienne Balibar and Emmanuel Wallerstein, eds. Pp. 17-28. New York: Verso Press.

Barber, Benjamin

1995 *Jihad vs McWorld*. New York: Times Books.

Barkan, Elazar.

1992 *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bennet, Andy

1999 *'Rappin' on the Tyne: White Hip Hop Culture in North East England - An Ethnographic Study*. *Sociological Review* 47: 1-24.

Bhabba, Homi K.

1994 *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

1988 *The Commitment to Theory*. *New Formations* 5: 5-24.

Bourdieu, Pierre

1984 *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Buchanan, Kerry

2000 *A Maori Warrior Claims New Territory*. *UNESCO Courier* July: 32-36.

Cabral, Amilcar

1973 *National Liberation and Culture. Return to the Source: Selected Speeches by Amilcar Cabral*, ed. African Information Service and African Party for the Independence of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC).

Carter, Bob, Harris, Clive, Green, Marci and Halpern, Rick
1996 *Immigration Policy and the Racialization of Migrant Labour: The Construction of National Identities in the USA and Britain*. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19(1):135-157.

Carter, Bob, Harris, Clive and Joshi, Shirley
1993 *The 1951-55 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration*. In *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*. James Winston and Clive Harris, eds. Pp. 55-72. London and New York: Verso.

Chambers, Iain

1975 *A Strategy for Living: Black Music and White Subcultures*. In *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds. Pp. 157-166. London: Routledge.

Condry, Ian

1999 *Japanese Rap Music: An Ethnography of Globalization in Popular Culture*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Yale University.

Cook, Richard

1999 *The White DJ in Black Culture*. *New Statesman* 128(2):18-22.

Daye, Sharon J.

1994 *Middle Class Blacks in Britain: A Racial Formation of a Class Group or a Class Fraction of a Racial Group?* New York: St. Martin's Press.

deCerteau, Michel

1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- DeMott, Benj
1988 *The Future is Unwritten: Working-Class Youth Cultures in England and America*. *Critical Texts* 5(1): 42-58.
- Dyson, Michael Eric
1996 *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fanon, Franz
1967 *Black Skin White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Finnegan, Ruth H.
1989 *The Hidden Musicians: Music Making in an English Town*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Flores, Juan
2000 *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Foner, Nancy
1987 *West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis*. In *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions*. Staten Island: The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Inc.
- Foreman, Murray
2000 'Represent': Race, Space and Place in Rap Music. *Popular Music* 19(1)65-90.
- Frankenberg, Ruth
1997 *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Frith, Simon
1996 *Music and Identity*. In *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, eds. Pp. 108-127. London: Sage Publications.
- 1992 *The Cultural Study of Popular Music*. In *Cultural Studies*. Lawrence Grossberg, Gary Nelson and Paula A. Treicher, eds. Pp. 174-186. New York: Routledge.
- Fryer, Peter
1989 *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London: Pluto Press.

1988 *Black People in the British Empire: An Introduction*. London: Pluto Press.

Gilroy, Paul

2000 *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

1994 *Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenging of a Changing Same*. In *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*. Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley, eds. Pp. 93-117. New York and London: Verso.

1993 *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.

1992 *It's a Family Affair*. In *Black Popular Culture*. Gina Dent, ed. Pp. 303-316. Seattle: Bay Press.

1982 *Steppin' Out of Babylon-Race, Class and Autonomy*. In *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. Pp. 276-314. Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. London: Routledge.

1988 *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. London: Hutchinson.

Grundman, Roy

1995 *Black Nationhood and the Rest in the West: An Interview with Isaac Julien*. *Cineaste* 21(1-2): 28-31.

Guerila Journalist's Guild.

2000 *Bourgie*. Barbara Ellen, ed.

Gupta, Akhil and Ferguson, James

1992 *Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference*. *Cultural Anthropology* 7: 6-23.

Gutzmore, Cecil

1993 *Carnival, the State and the Black Masses in the United Kingdom*. In *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*, Winston James and Clive Harris, eds. Pp. 207-230. London & New York: Verso.

Hager, Steven

1984 *Hip Hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti*. New York: St. Martins Press.

Hall, Stuart

2000 *Frontlines and Backyards: The Terms of Change*. In *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*. Kwesi Owusu, ed. Pp.127-129. London and New York: Routledge.

1997 *The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity*. In *Culture and Globalization and the World System*. Pp. 19-39. Anthony D. King, ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

1994 *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. In *Identity: Community, Culture & Difference*. Jonathon Rutherford, ed. Pp. 222-237. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

1992 *The Question of Cultural Identity*. In *Modernity and its Future*. Stuart Hall, David Held, Tony McGrew, eds. Pp. 274-316. Cambridge: Polity Press.

1988 'New Ethnicities'. In *Black Film, British Cinema*. Kobena Mercer, ed. BFI/ICA Documents 7: 27-31.

1987 *Minimal Selves*. In *Identity: The Real Me*. London: ICA Documents 6: 44-46.

1978 *Policing the Crisis: 'Mugging', the State, and Law and Order*. New York: Holmes and Meier.

Hall, Stuart and Jefferson, Tony, Eds

1975 *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post War Britain*. London: Routledge.

Hannerz, Ulf

1997 *Scenarios for Peripheral Cultures*. In *Culture and Globalization and the World System*. Anthony D. King, ed. Pp. 107-128. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

1991 *The World in Creolisation*. *Africa* 57(4): 546-59.

Harris, Clive

- 1993 Post-war Migration and the Industrial Reserve Army.
In *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*.
Pp. 9-54. Winston James and Clive Harris, eds. London
and New York: Verso.

Harvey, David

- 1989 *The Condition of Postmodernity: Engaging in the
Origins of Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers LTD.

Hebdige, Dick

- 1987 *Cut N' Mix: Culture Identity and Caribbean Music*.
London and New York: Routledge.

- 1979 *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.

Hewitt, Roger

- 1986 *White Talk Black Talk: Inter-Racial Friendship and
Communication Among Adolescents*. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Hind, John and Mosco, Stephen

- 1985 *Rebel Radio: The Full Story of British Pirate Radio*.
London: Pluto Press.

James, Winston and Harris, Clive

- 1993 *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*.
London; New York: Verso.

Jones, Simon

- 1988 *Black Culture, White Youth: The Reggae Tradition
From JA to UK*. London: Macmillan Education.

Katznelson, Ira

- 1976 *Black Men, White Cities*. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press.

Kelley, Robin D. G

- 1997 *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars
in Urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- 1994 *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black
Working Class*. New York: The Free Press.

- King, Anthony D., Ed
1997 Introduction: Spaces of Culture, Spaces of Knowledge. Culture Globalization and the World System. In Contemporary Conditions For the Representation of Identity. Pp. 1-18. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Krenichyn, K, Saegert, S and Evans, G.
Parents as Moderators of Children's Exposure to Community Violence. Journal of Applied Psychology, in press.
- Krims, Adam
2000 Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kundami, Arun
2000 'Stumbling On': Race, Class and England. Race and Class 41(4): 1-18.
- Lash, Scott and Urry, John
1987 The End of Organized Capitalism. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Lawrence, Daniel
1974 Black Migrants, White Natives: A Study of Race Relations in Nottingham. London; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawrence, Errol
1982 Just Plain Common Sense: The 'Roots' of Racism. In The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain. London: Routledge.
- Lemelle, Sidney and Kelley, Robin D.G., Eds
1994 Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora. London: Verso.
- Lipsitz, George
1994 Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place. London and New York: Verso.
- Lott, Eric
1993 Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Luri, Celia
1996 *Consumer Culture Reborn*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Mailer, Norman
1959 *The White Negro*. In *Advertisements for Myself*. New York: Putnam.
- Marable, Manning
1995 *Beyond Black and White: Transforming American Politics*. New York and London: Verso.
- Marks, Anthony
1990 *Young Black and Gifted: Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean Music in Britain 1963-88*. In *Black Music in Britain: Essays on the Afro-Asian Contribution to Popular Music*. Paul Oliver, ed. Pp. 103-117. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- McRobbie, Angela
1993 *Shut and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity*. *Cultural Studies* 7(3): 406-426.
- Mercer, Kobena
1992 *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Mitchell, Tony
1996 *Popular Music & Local Identity: Rock, Pop, and Rap in Europe and Oceania*. New York: Leicester University Press.
- Modood, Tariq
1994 *Political Blackness and British Asians*. *Sociology* 28(4): 859-876.
- Nelson, Havelock and Gonzales, Michael
1991 *Bring the Noise: A Guide to Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*. New York: Harmony Books.
- Noys, Benjamin
1995 *Into the Jungle*. *Popular Music* 14(3): 321-332.
- Owusu, Kwesi, Ed
2000 *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

Perkins, William Eric, Ed

1996 *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Philips, Deborah

1998 Black Minority Ethnic Concentration, Segregation and Dispersal in Britain. *Urban Studies* 35(10): 1681-1702.

Robertson, Roland

1995 Glocalization: Time Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity. In *Global Modernities*. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson, eds. Pp. 25-44. London: Sage Publications.

Roediger, David R.

1993 *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso.

Rose, E.J.

1969 *Color and Citizenship*. London: IRR/OUP.

Rose, Tricia

1994a *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press.

1994b *A Style Nobody Can Deal With: Politics, Style and the Postindustrial City in Hip Hop*. In *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Culture*. Michael Ross and Tricia Rose, eds. Pp. 71-88. New York: Routledge.

Samsone, Livio

1994 *The Making Youth Culture in Amsterdam: The New Subculture of Lower-Class Young Black Males of Surinamese Origin in Amsterdam*. *Critique of Anthropology* 14(2): 173-198.

Scott, James

1985 *Weapon's of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shyllon, Folarin

1982 Black People in Britain: A Historical and Analytical Overview: *In Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Joseph Harris, ed. Pp. 170-194. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.

Sivanandan, Ambalavaner

1981 From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain. *Race and Class* 23(2-3): 111-51.

Small, Stephen

1994 Racialised Barriers: The Black Experience in the United States and England in the 1980s. New York: Routledge.

Smash, Nick

1990 Hip Hop 86-89. Essex: Internation Music Publications.

Smith, Zadie

2000 White Teeth. New York: Random House.

Solomos, John

1989 Race and Racism in Britain. Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press LTD.

Stacy, Dan.

1999 London Pride. *Hip Hop Connection*. April.

Stepan, Nancy

1982 The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960. Connecticut: Arch Books.

Stephens, Gregory

1992 Interracial Dialogue in Rap Music: Call and Response in a Multicultural Style. *New Formations* 6: 62-79.

Stolcke, Verena

1993 Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe. *Current Anthropology* 36(1): 1-13.

Tate, Greg

1992 Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America. New York: Simon and Schuster.

- Thornton, Sarah
1995 The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital. In The Subcultures Reader. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, eds Pp. 200-209. London: Routledge.
- Toop, David
1984a Fresh! Electro. *The Face* 49:May.

1984b The Rap Attack 2: African Jive to New York Hip Hop. London: Pluto Press.
- Turner, Terrance
1994 Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What is Anthropology that Multiculturalists Should Be Mindful of It? In *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. David Theo Goldberg, ed. Pp. 406-425. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wade, Peter
1999 Making Cultural Identities in Cali, Columbia. *Current Anthropology* 40(4): 449-471.
- Walser, Robert
1993 *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Watkins, Craig S.
1998 *Representing: Hip Hop and the Production of Black Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Williams, Raymond
1980 *Problems in Materialism and Marxism: Selected Essays*. London: NLB.

1977 *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

1976 *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Willis, Paul
1990 *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young*. Boulder & San Francisco: Westview Press.

Wood, Joe

1991 The Yellow Negro. Transition. The White Issue.
Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, eds. 7(1): 41-66.

Newspaper Articles

Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin

2000 A Magic Carpet of Cultures in London: On the City's New Arts Scene, Racial Barriers Crumble and Outsiders Crowd Inside. New York Times. June 25. Arts & Leisure.

Burrell, Ian

Racial Jealousy May Have Been Motive Behind 1999 Shooting. Independent (London). July 20. A5.

Ellen, Barbara

1999 White Lies, Black Truth. Observer (London). July 29. A29.

Gentlemen, Amelia and Wilson, Jamie

1999 How Racist Are Our Institutions? Guardian (London). February 24. A5.

Odell, Michael

1999 Hip Hop Nation: Brit Hop Why it Didn't Happen. Guardian (London). March 19. Friday Review. P.3.

Philips, Trevor

2000 The Myth of Gold Chains and No Brains. Observer (London). Electronic Document,
<http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Archive/0,4273,4023482,00.html>, accessed September 1.

Sheehan, Maave and Trump, Simon

1999 He Speaks Like a West Indian, is the son of a bishop and was shot in the street. Welcome to the Weird World of Tim Westwood, Radio 1 DJ. Sunday Times (London). July 25. A 13.

Gifted, Black ... and Gone. Guardian (London). Electronic

Document, <http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Archive/0,4273,4023482,00.html>, accessed September 18.

Reports

- 2000 1998/99 Hackney Crime and Disorder Audit. Hackney Council. Database on-line.
- 2000 London Housing Unit. History of Council Housing. Database on-line.
- 2000 1998/99 London Housing Unit. London Housing Fact File. Database on-line.
- 2000 Demographics and Statistical Studies. London Research Centre. Database on-line.
- 1999 United Kingdom. BPI Market Information. No. 124. June 14.
- 1997 United Kingdom. Ethnic Composition of Britain. Institute of Race Relations. Database on-line.
- 1994 United Kingdom. Census Statistical Paper No. 1: Black People in Britain: Social and Economic Circumstances. Center For Research in Ethnic and Relations. 1991. University of Warwick. National Ethnic Minority Archive.

Discography

- Acyde, *Capital L City*, If Its Not 100% UK Hip Hop You Can Have Your Money Back, SSR Records, 2000.
- Blade Featuring Mark B, *We'll Survive*, Jazz Fudge Records, 1998.
- Blak Twang, *19 Long Time: Live From the Big Smoke*, Jammin Records, London 1998.
- Blak Twang Featuring Fallacy, *The Homegrown*, Echoes, 1997.
- B.R.O.T.H.E.R. *Beyond the 16th Parallel, 4th and Broadway*, 1989.
- Björk, *Telegram*, Elektra Entertainment Group, 1996.
- Dobie, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, Pussyfoot Records Limited, 1998.

57th Dynasty, *Spoken Word*, FasFwd Records, 1999.

Katch 22, *Diary of a Blackman Living in the Land of the Lost*, Kold Sweat Records, 1990.

London Posse, *How Is Life in London?* Bullet Records, 1993.

Money Mad, Justice Records, 1988.

Mark B & The M.U.D. Family, *The Half of It*, K'Boro Records, 1998.

The M.U.D. Family, *Rich N' Switch*, K'Boro Records. 1997.

Roots Manuva, *Brand New Second Hand*, Big Dada, 1999.

Task Force, *New Mic Order*, K'Boro Records, 1999.

12 Stone. *Stone-Age 2000*. 12 Stone Productions & Records LTD. 2000.

Various Artists, *If Its Not 100% UK Hip Hop You Can Have Your Money Back*, SSR Records, 2000.