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THE POLITICS OF HIP HOP: A POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF HIP HOP'S HISTORY AND
ITS COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH CAPITALISM

by

DANIELLE GARCIA

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in the Political Science program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in the Political Science
Program in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The Politics of Hip Hop: A Political Analysis of Hip Hop's History and Its Complicated

Relationship with Capitalism

by

Danielle Garcia

Advisor: Dr. Ruth O'Brien

This thesis examines the emergence of the Hip Hop movement in the 1970s in areas of New York City often referred to more generally as the South Bronx. Focusing mostly on the 1970s and 1980s, this thesis explores the underlying conditions that Hip Hop was born out of. Influenced by both global and national politics, Hip Hop provided a common space for underrepresented individuals and groups to unify, create common identities, and liberate themselves from the oppressive norms and political activity of a rich, mostly white, and dominant American society that tried to erase or silence them. This revolutionary aspect of Hip Hop politics will be argued and explained, but it does not tell the whole story. This thesis also argues that while Hip Hop fundamentally has revolutionary potential, that potential in practice is ultimately stiffened by its existence as a commodity within late capitalism.

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INTRODUCTION

The politics of Hip Hop, like most other politics, are complex, nuanced, controversial and sometimes contradictory. On one hand, Hip Hop as a movement holds the potential for revolutionary change. Born out of the ashes in a place left abandoned and destroyed by actors of the United States government, Hip Hop allowed for underrepresented groups of Americans, particularly New Yorkers in its beginnings, to find a sort of liberation and unification in a time when mainstream society was trying to take that away from them. These new displays of community and liberation were different from what was seen before. Hip Hop as a movement grounded itself in common resistance identities and the usage of public space for creative, cultural, and political expression. It created space and moments for people to feel free and be united with one another in societies and communities where the state was forcing divisions and oppression amongst and within communities, particularly lower-income communities made up of mostly Black and brown Americans. This thesis will investigate the history of Hip Hop in New York City as a politics and analyze the implications of Hip Hop Politics on the American state, and vice versa.

New York City is not known as the “Big Apple” or the “Center of the Universe” by chance or accident. During the 1930s and in the midst of the depression, New York City administrators, politicians, and businessmen were determined to make New York City a “modern city.” Soon, NYC was on its journey to becoming a modern metropolis filled with skyscrapers, wealth and dreams of economic opportunity. Even though the Great Depression was heightening during this time, plans to build up the city were coming in rapidly and being executed just as rapidly. Maybe meant to incite a feeling of hope for a better, more modern world or future, New

York City was being rapidly developed and it wasn't long until the 77-storey Chrysler Building was constructed and finished in 1930, briefly taking the title as the tallest building in the world. Eleven short months later and developers had already beaten that record with the construction of the Empire State Building, measuring at 102 stories and stealing the title.¹ New York City was in a competition with itself to become more modernized. Wealthy, mostly white New Yorkers were developing parts of New York City: Building structures that were taller and newer and ready for a huge boom of workers. And it wasn't only skyscrapers, but roads, and parks, and other public spaces meant to connect and modernize specific areas around New York City were popping up madly. These new developments were strategic and had political, social, and economic implications on surrounding communities. Simultaneously, the same developers responsible for building up the city were also tearing other parts down.

CHAPTER 1: New York City and Hip Hop Politics

In the early 1970s, New York City was experiencing something both devastating and extraordinary. Parts of the Bronx were being destroyed and systematically neglected, while other parts were being built up and rigorously invested into by New York State and private actors. The landscape of the city was changing — again — physically, socially, culturally, and politically. And while some neighborhoods in the city were burning quite literally, others, some just blocks away, were thriving. The urban planning, resource deprivation, and intentional systemic neglect in the Bronx in the 1970s exacerbated class and racial inequalities, disproportionately harming Black and Latino communities. Despite the harsh conditions of parts of the Bronx and the implications of state-sanctioned neglect of the city, culture and community still thrived, even

¹New York Almanack. "1930s Gotham Rising: New York Skyscrapers," New York Almanack. 2020. <https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2016/11/1930s-gotham-rising-new-york-skyscrapers/>

though it may have looked different. There was also an active political and cultural resistance to the suffering imposed by the state that came about through Hip Hop music, art, and culture.

Hip Hop was, and still is, in a lot of ways, a response to the oppressive state that exists in the American system that created this situation in 1970s New York — but that's not all Hip Hop is. Hip Hop is an interdisciplinary, multi-faceted and nuanced subject that I believe deserves a lot of attention and care, especially with its continued growth and expansion around and throughout the world. The literature has specific focuses on the history of Hip Hop, specifically during the time period of the formation of Hip Hop in New York City in the 1970s. Because there is so much to uncover in Hip Hop's movement — around the globe and across disciplinary fields — this literature review will be limited to review specific arguments and elements of Hip Hop as a movement in the United States, to hopefully inform future research about Hip Hop's formation and its political content. The questions I aim to answer with this research are: How and why did politics, economics, and identity synthesize in the Bronx in the early 1970s to formulate the Hip Hop movement? Why this specific time and area? How has Hip Hop changed through time and space since its inception? What is the standing of the modern Hip Hop movement today? Hip Hop continues to grow and expand, and become more and more significant in our society and in other societies around the world. Therefore, it is imperative that we continue to take time and care to analyze and understand Hip Hop politics because they can inform us about society and identity, race and class, politics, philosophy, and more.

It cannot be overstated that Hip Hop is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary and therefore encompasses a vast array of diverse subjects: Sociology, Political Science, History,

Economics, Cultural Studies, Music Theory, Gender Studies, Critical Race Theory, Dance, and Art. This means that the discourse and literature reflect this and are also extremely diverse in terms of its subject matter. Because of this, in an attempt to narrow the focus on the politics of Hip Hop, the purpose of this review will be limited and will aim to only pull the political elements of Hip Hop from the literature to understand a comprehensive “Hip Hop politics.” This does not mean that all the sources or arguments will be political in terms of the discipline, but the concepts and arguments pulled will be used as evidence of and for an existing Hip Hop politics.

1.1: the South Bronx and Contested Geography

A current map of the Bronx places the South Bronx right above Mott Haven, under Melrose and Concourse Village, between East 141st Street and East 156th Street.² The apartment complex where legendary DJ Kool Herc hosted the block party that “birthed”³ Hip Hop was located at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue all the way on the other side of the Bronx, in the West Bronx, off of West 174th Street. The reason for pointing out this, what may be seen as a small detail or difference, is to argue that the “South Bronx” is not just a geographic place, but a “metaphor,” an area with “contested and shifting boundaries,” that also acts as a “term describing the worst nightmares of urban decay.”⁴

The South Bronx is a contested and elusive space and place that follows the residents of the pockets of urban decay. In “‘We out here’: Skateboarding, segregation and resistance in the Bronx,” Katherine White notes that the South Bronx that exists metaphorically today is much

²Google Maps of Bronx, NY accessed at [Google Maps: Bronx, NY](#)

³Streeteasy Real Estate, The Birthplace of Hip Hop retrieved from <https://streeteasy.com/blog/birthplace-of-hip-hop/>

⁴Katherine Elizabeth White, “We out here”: Skateboarding, Segregation and Resistance in the Bronx. *Fordham University, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. 2015, 28-29.

larger than the original South Bronx was intended to mean. The South Bronx has an extremely unique, rich and interesting history. In "From Doo Wop to Hip Hop: The Bittersweet Odyssey of African Americans in the South Bronx" Mark Naison explores the changing landscape of the Patterson Houses in the South Bronx during the 1950s through the 1970s and highlights the continuation of communal spirit through changing and harsh circumstances. Hip Hop can inform us a lot about the changes that the Patterson houses were going through. Through a series of interviews, Naison aimed to understand the lived experiences of the Patterson residents. During the early 1950s, Naison recounts a strong sense of community that is often hard to come by now. There was a strong sense of "communal supervision, and the families who lived there, who Naison notes were "90 percent Black and Hispanic" took care of one another and took "responsibility for raising one another's children."⁵ The school district's extracurricular programs were plentiful, their music and creativity resources readily accessible for the students and children of the community to take advantage of. Naison claimed that during this time, right before the "decay" of the South Bronx in the 1970s, most Patterson residents had a "sense, reinforced by public policy and lived experience, that life was getting better," that there was a general feeling of hope for the future among the community there. Unfortunately for the residents, this was not the case and life in these communities was about to be complicated by politics.

The Cross Bronx Expressway was the next master-plan to make New York City more connected and more modern. In the late 1930s after a stream of skyscrapers were constructed around the city, early plans to build the Cross Bronx Expressway began. The original plan for the

⁵Mark Naison, "From Doo Wop to Hip Hop: The bittersweet odyssey of African Americans in the South Bronx." *Socialism and Democracy* 2004, 37-49.

Expressway was to connect the George Washington Bridge with the proposed, but never fulfilled, Bronx-Whitestone Bridge and to then connect the TriBorough Bridge with Connecticut.⁶ These early plans were complicated by engineering and design challenges and extremely high costs that delayed its construction.

However, by 1945, public official and architect Robert Moses, often referred to as the “Master Builder” of New York City,⁷ proposed a system of open highways that stretched 8.3 miles long, “through the heart of the South Bronx,” cutting through “one hundred and thirteen streets, seven expressways and parkways (either completed or under construction), one subway line, five elevated lines, three commuter rail lines, and hundreds of utility, water and sewer lines.”⁸ The Cross Bronx Expressway, in its completion, connected New Jersey, Northern Manhattan, parts of the Bronx, and Long Island. It also subsequently tore through the Bronx, quite literally, destroying neighborhoods in its path and leading to about 60,000 displaced Bronx residents who had to now be relocated to new areas, most of them hailing from an area known as the South Bronx.⁹ While this project made New York more connected and more modern for some, it forced other groups into areas of isolation and destruction. The Bronx was hit hard by this destruction, and the communities started to change — socially, ethnically, racially, economically, physically, and politically.

⁶NYC Roads. Cross Bronx Expressway (I-95, I-295 and US 1. Retrieved from <http://www.nycroads.com/roads/cross-bronx>, 2003.

⁷Michael Powell, “A Tale of Two Cities.” *The New York Times*, 2007

⁸NYC Roads. Cross Bronx Expressway (I-95, I-295 and US 1. Retrieved from <http://www.nycroads.com/roads/cross-bronx>, 2003.

⁹Bradley Gardener. “And then the neighborhood changed: Jewish intra-urban migration and racial identity in the Bronx, NY.” *City University of New York, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2012, 32-77.

A large portion of the population of the Bronx before the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway was white and Jewish, but it did not stay that way for long after. Many of the Jewish neighborhoods surrounding the areas soon after the construction of the Expressway “dissolved through rapid out-migration” and the white Jewish population became minimal.¹⁰ Bradley Gardener of the City University of New York showcases how drastically the population changed in his findings: In 1957, 65% of the West Bronx, or about 125,000 people, were Jewish, but by 1980, the population of Jewish people dropped to 2,000.¹¹ The Jews who fled these areas migrated to different parts of New York: the “North Bronx, Co-op City, the metropolitan suburbs, and Southern Florida.”¹² With an exodus of a large portion of the population, these areas started to see isolation — some subsequently saw destruction. Newly abandoned apartment buildings in the Bronx were being burned for insurance money and parts of the Bronx were quite literally turned into ash.¹³ These conditions, however, also meant a lower cost of living, while the cost of living in the areas that were being built was increasing. African American and Latinx communities mostly of lower incomes started to move into the housing that was left abandoned by the Jewish Americans that previously lived there.

The racial differences in the groups is significant as this neighborhood was experiencing racialization. In his review, Gardner points out the importance of race during this period of migration, as well as the importance of racial dynamics in Bronx neighborhoods, synthesizing

¹⁰Bradley Gardener, “And then the neighborhood changed: Jewish intra-urban migration and racial identity in the Bronx, NY.” *City University of New York, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2012, 32-77.

¹¹Bradley Gardener, “And then the neighborhood changed: Jewish intra-urban migration and racial identity in the Bronx, NY.” *City University of New York, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2012, 32-77.

¹²Henry Chalfante, “From Mambo to Hip Hop: A South Bronx Tale” MVD Visual. *LPB Productions*, 2006.

¹³Henry Chalfante, “From Mambo to Hip Hop: A South Bronx Tale” MVD Visual. *LPB Productions*, 2006.

these regional experiences with greater national events that were taking place at the same time that were “helping Jews both understand themselves as, and be understood, as white.” The events that he says included “the experience of male Jews in World War II, the United States’ government facilitated social mobility for white European males through programs like the G.I. Bill, the changing dynamics of racial classification by scientists, and right leaning Jewish intellectuals who sought to distinguish Jews from African Americans.” For example, the passing of the G.I. Bill, while it helped many Americans, it was also a successful tool in creating a more racialized society in the United States. The G.I. Bill was symbolic of a racialized United States. While it protected white American veterans, Black American veterans were purposely excluded from its provisions on local levels, since it was up to the local governments to enforce. It was a culture shaping initiative that not only created a more socialized America, but a more racialized America as well. The instance of the rapid Jewish migration out of the Bronx would be considered “white flight,” by many scholars’ standards, defined by scholar Eli Lederhendler as “the exit of many middle-class white residents and an accelerating in-migration of non-whites,” which is what was occurring in the South Bronx.¹⁴ This instance of “white flight” also had implications on the local economies, in addition to the poor conditions that were being forced onto these neighborhoods.

By the early 1970s, New York City as a whole was facing an economic crisis, but the lower-income, underserved communities across the boroughs were hit the hardest by the social and economic implications. In an attempt to boost the economy, New York City directed “money, social services, and other state resources” into many Lower and Midtown Manhattan

¹⁴Eli Lederhendler, “New York City, the Jews, and ‘The Urban Experience.’” In “*Studies in Contemporary Jewry an Annual XV 1999.*” New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 49-67.

neighborhoods “to attract business and tourists” into the boroughs, without paying mind the implications on the outer boroughs. This investment in Manhattan was “at the expense of neighborhoods in the outer boroughs,” where planned shrinkage and disinvestments would begin. This shrinkage and disinvestment took a serious toll on the South Bronx. Between 1970 and 1980, poverty in the South Bronx skyrocketed, along with unemployment and crime rates.¹⁵ But this is not to say that the South Bronx was being lost as a neighborhood. A beautiful and powerful movement would be created out of this situation.

In this same line of thinking, Scholar Kosanovich notes that much of the existing literature on white flight in the South Bronx is limited in that it mainly focuses on urban decay from the perspective of the whites who are fleeing it, rather than the Black and brown communities that are suffering its negative implications. Kasonovich argues that by focusing only on the perspectives of the white actors who fled, and by “tracing the ways in which the “Bronx” experienced urban decline from the perspective of white flight and municipal disinvestment,” that it “erases an extant cultural and material history of African American and Latino urbanity,”¹⁶ Kosanovich argues that what some academics saw as “urban decline,” or “a sign of cultural and material disintegration” in areas like the South Bronx, was rather an “emergence of new combinations of culture” that came from the communities in the Bronx’s

¹⁵Len Albright, “Race, Space, And Exclusion: Segregation And Beyond In Metropolitan America,” & *Community. Oxford.* 2015, 435-437.

¹⁶Kevin Kosanovich, “Making the Bronx Move: Hip-Hop Culture and History from the Bronx River Houses to the Parisian Suburbs, 1951-1984” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.* 2015, 5-9.

changing landscape.¹⁷ This emergence of new combinations of culture included a plethora of new cultural, artistic, musical, political and technical innovations.

1.2: Hip Hop as Politics

Now that the contested geography of New York City and the South Bronx has been addressed, the next task will be to understand Hip Hop as a politics. In their work “Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-hop and Resistance in the City,” author M. Lamott argues that Hip Hop was originally formulated as a political discourse. Lamott explores the political dimensions of Hip Hop and argues that it is a form of activism and that it ought to be recognized as a resistance practice. Lamott frames Hip Hop as a potential challenger to American democracy and argues that it is an “autonomous space in which to practice citizenship.” He solidifies Hip Hop as a movement, a movement that is “rooted in a struggle for public space and a claim for street presence.”¹⁸ Lamott grounds his argument using the resistance paradigm, which focuses on the micro politics of resistance, and emphasizes the importance of “everyday” acts of resistance. The resistance politics he is speaking on “do not necessarily reflect against an opponent, an idea or a system” in particular, and still actively “participate in the construction of subjectivities of resistance by sharing a common language.” It is in the liberating potential of the daily practices of resistance that one finds an alternative way to practice citizenship, a kind of political imaginary that resists the dominant one. Everyday acts of resistance, like gathering and creating community in public space when the state is trying to destroy that public space, is imperative to understanding Hip Hop as a resistance practice.

¹⁷Kevin Kosanovich, “Making the Bronx Move: Hip-Hop Culture and History from the Bronx River Houses to the Parisian Suburbs, 1951-1984” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*. 2015, 7-8.

¹⁸Martin Lamotte. “Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-hop and Resistance in the City.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *ProQuest Publishing* 2014: 686–694.

The struggle for public space is a foundational element of the creation of the Hip Hop movement and this is echoed by other scholars. In “Styles of Struggle,” Curtis Edwards argues that Hip Hop is a form of politics, specifically what he calls a form of “freestyle politics,” defined as “a mode of political struggle that draws on the raw materials, possibilities, and meanings of the moment, yet assembles, reformulates, and deploys them in new and unexpected ways.”¹⁹ Freestyle politics embodies the innovation of the actors of the movement at the time. Freestyle politics is about taking what little you have and reinventing it and making it activism. In action, Freestyle politics might look like an informal stand and a turntable set up in a public space, where Hip Hop actors like break dancers “freestyled on the old tradition of opening fire hydrants to provide aquatic entertainment on hot summer days,” and DJs hooked their speakers and tables up to nearby street lamps, “liberating the electricity that would fuel their sonic occupations of public space.”²⁰ These freestyle politics were “multiracial, anti-imperialist, and deeply invested in struggles over race and space.”²¹ To achieve these freestyle politics, actors in the movement were innovative and did indeed “reformulate” and “deploy” these raw materials (the water from the fire hydrant, or the electricity from the street lamps, for example) and transformed them into art, culture, and politics, an act of resistance through innovation. The centrality of public space is also symbolic — It was a way of resistance to their mainstream

¹⁹Cutler Curtis Edwards. “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 14-16.

²⁰Cutler Curtis Edwards. “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 105-110.

²¹Cutler Curtis Edwards. “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 3-20.

usage, a way of formulating a common space — taking back or reclaiming space that should have been nothing but isolation or ashes.

1.3: Decolonization in Hip Hop

There is an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial aspect of Hip Hop that is worth further analysis. Afrika Bambaataa, leader, Hip Hop artist, and one of Hip Hop's first pioneers, was born in the Bronx to Jamaican and Barbadian parents, and to a mother who had grown up “immersed in international Black cultural and liberation movements,” with an uncle who was a known Black nationalist.²² Black liberation was important to Bambaataa, and Bambaataa was foundational in the creation of Hip Hop, meaning that these values slipped into the fundamentals of the Hip Hop movement. Bambaataa was not shy to let the world know about his admiration for resistance politics in his music and his everyday life. He had a deep connection to the 1964 Michael Caine film *Zulu*: a film about African resistance to British imperialism, and his admiration for these resistance politics shown bright through his music and leadership.²³

Born with the name “Lance Taylor,” he gave himself the name Afrika Bambaataa to honor the Zulu chieftain Bambaata who led an anti-British rebellion in the South African province of Natal during the struggle for power.²⁴ It also may not be a coincidence that during the time of Hip Hop's emergence, the decolonization of Africa was in its final stages.

²²Cutler Curtis Edwards. “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 108-110.

²³Jeff Chang “Can't stop, won't stop: A history of the Hip Hop generation.” *New York: St. Martin's Press*. 2005, 92-93.

²⁴Cutler Curtis Edwards. “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 108-110.

Decolonization politics were gaining traction among Black intellectuals like Bambaata and Bambaataa had firsthand experience with the social implications of the urban decay of the Bronx, making him fit to be a leader in the resistance movement. In his youth, Bambaataa got caught up in crime and gang culture and spent the early 1970s as a gang leader in what was known as the Black Spades gang. When Bambaataa made the decision to change his lifestyle, his previous experience in gang leadership actually proved to be useful in his transition to his community leadership. He created different organizations to unite the youth in the communities and provide productive alternatives to gang violence and crime that the city was experiencing.

One of the Bronx community organizations he created, the Zulu Nation, was dedicated to and honored the Zulu resistance to British Imperialism. His creation of this community organization was really an act of resistance in itself, providing space and opportunity for youth that New York State was not making space or opportunity for. Creating the Zulu Nation was an attempt to create a public space where youth could channel their emotion and experiences into music, dance, and graffiti.²⁵ Bambaataa used his leadership skills to organize youth to “throw jams, speak across histories of violent rivalry, and work to establish a sense of community and unity that allowed Hip Hop to flourish in the face of institutional hostility,” in what scholar Curtis Edwards describes as a “decolonizing effort.”²⁶ This decolonizing aspect was present in a lot of the music, art and dance, in an effort to reclaim space and place for purposes of rejecting “the intrusions of capital.”²⁷ Edwards argues that community organizing was not the only

²⁵Tara Jabbaar-Gyambrah, “Hip Hop, Hip Life: Global Sistahs” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2007. 38-84

²⁶Cutler Curtis Edwards, “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 109-110.

²⁷Cutler Curtis Edwards, “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 109-126.

domestic “decolonization” efforts taking place in this time period in New York City; that “simply surviving or even thriving in Harlem or the South Bronx was a declaration of self-determination, an individual act of bodily decolonization.”²⁸ The politics of individual decolonization and greater global decolonization are fundamental to Hip Hop’s history.

Hip Hop’s roots are culturally and ethnically diverse. Each of the foundational creators and leaders of the movement had a different background, a different story and a different way of creating art and culture. DJ Kool Herc, one of Hip Hop’s pioneers and host of the “first” Hip Hop block party, was Jamaican-born. Another major player in the movement, Grandmaster Flash, hailed from Barbados. Each brought their own native influence to a uniquely American Hip Hop art form. Global Black culture, politics, and music played an extremely important role in forming Hip Hop. “Break beats” which is a popular form of music in Hip Hop that utilizes breaks in music for Hip Hop’s “b-boys and b-girls” to dance in between originated from Jamaica.²⁹ Scholar Jabbaar-Gyambrah points out that the influence of African music as well, in addition to politics in Africa, run deep through the veins of Hip Hop music, with South Bronx underserved communities emulating African storytelling tradition, or griot, through rapping and the use of call and response, and the invention and re-invention of a new, personal vocabulary.³⁰

²⁸Cutler Curtis Edwards, “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 109-140.

²⁹Abbie Swanson, “The South Bronx: Where Hip-Hop Was Born” WNYC: *New York Public Radio*. 2010.

³⁰Tara Jabbaar-Gyambrah. “Hip -Hop, Hip -Life: Global Sistahs”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2007, 38-84.

CHAPTER 2: Elements of Hip Hop Politics

2.1: Resistance Identities and a Common Language

During this time, Hip Hop was commenting on the space that was created by intentional urban decay. Block parties took place in abandoned buildings and on the center of what might have been a busy street. Hip Hop actors and Bronx community members were utilizing the public space that existed there to create art and culture, to spread knowledge, to facilitate self-determination and resistance to hegemony, to reclaim and build community and space and to promote self-determination as exemplified by Afrika Bambaata's aforementioned initiatives. What results from these practices was a "construction of resistance identities and their ambiguities," according to Lamott. These new resistance identities were revolutionary and today connect youths around the world, though that is a discussion that shall be saved for another project.

In line with Edwards, Lamott argues that Hip Hop provides a place to express one's emotions, a "space for rage" as they put it. It also provides hope for "urban youth" against marginalization, isolation and exclusion. This is all part of what he refers to as "the resistance paradigm" which focuses on the micro politics of resistance, or the "everyday" individual actions of the people that promote a subjective language of resistance, that bring people together in a "different kind" of democracy. Citing prominent scholars like Tricia Rose and Jeff Chang, Lamott argues ultimately that Hip Hop is a challenger to American democracy because it created "an autonomous space in which to practice citizenship."³¹ It does this through creating a space, community and common interest that might not align with the mainstream.

³¹Martin Lamotte, "Rebels Without a Pause: Hip Hop and Resistance in the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2014. 686-694.

Hip Hop's alternative autonomous space gives way for a common language. Lamott and other scholars like Tricia Rose highlight different ways in which Hip Hop music advocates for a common language of resistance, for example, through hidden transcripts. Hidden transcripts in Hip Hop music occur when the communications through cultural forms, whether it be rap, dance, graffiti, etc., purposely use language or spelling that departs from that used by groups in the dominant culture. Hip Hop rap lyrics speak to a certain audience and they incorporate a certain vocabulary. As pointed out by Lamott, Hip Hop lyrics include "lexical items whose meanings are not meant to be discernible to a mainstream audience", and in this case are meant to "preserve a hidden form of communication among the Black community, that would be 'linguistically unintelligible to the oppressor.'"³² During this time, Hip Hop was speaking to and for the Black and brown communities of the South Bronx that were suffering the consequences of the actions of the state. Canonical author Tricia Rose also notes hidden transcripts as a defining element of Hip Hop throughout her canonical text, *Black Noise*. Speaking on rap specifically, Rose points out that resistance is a major theme in the lyrical content on the music. While not all rap songs may contain a specific hidden transcript on their own, a significant element of Hip Hop is engaged in "symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions and groups that symbolically, ideologically, and materially oppress African Americans," that rap's social commentary "enacts ideological subordination."³³

³²Martin Lamotte, "Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-hop and Resistance in the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2014, 690–701.

³³Tricia, Rose. "Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America" *University Press of New England*, 1994.

Within this common language, however, comes complications, specifically because of Hip Hop's existence within a capitalist society. Hip Hop, of course, had a relationship to the public. It took place in public, it spoke to groups of the public, and eventually it was co-opted by the public and made a commodity. Because of Hip Hop's complicated relationship to the public, Lamott argues that Hip Hop is rooted in an ambiguity between its inherent secrecy as a hidden transcript, and the task of becoming public in order to reach a larger audience and express emotions to others." This exact scenario, of Hip Hop as both resisting dominant culture but also "becoming public" is an issue for Hip Hop, but also an element of Hip Hop, and really any identity-based movement that can be co-opted by the dominant institution and marketed to the mass public. Today, Hip Hop is the most popular genre of music in the United States, a reflection of its mass commodification.³⁴

Tricia Rose also notes this issue in contemporary America, hidden popular transcripts are "readily absorbed into the public domain and subject to incorporation or invalidation."³⁵ This is a "frontier" between public and hidden transcripts that Rose describes as a "constant struggle between dominant and subordinate groups" and in response, Rap and Hip Hop creatives continue to innovate new strategies and languages of resistance. Rose refers to this as a "war" between the two groups; "the powerful" in this case the white elites in Manhattan, and "the subordinate," who in this case would be the disenfranchised communities in the outer Boroughs like the South Bronx.

³⁴John Lynch, "For the first time in history, Hip Hop has surpassed rock to become the most popular music genre" *Business Insider*, 2018.

³⁵Tricia Rose, "Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America" *University Press of New England*, 1994.

2.2: The Post Industrial City and A Capitalist Loop

The creation of Hip Hop under the unique social and economic circumstances of the 1970s Bronx has interesting and sometimes devastating implications on its movement through space and time. Some scholarship on Hip Hop tends to focus on the liberating, coalition-building, revolutionary potential of the movement, and history does show that Hip Hop has created solidarity, unity, and liberation for marginalized groups in times where it did not seem possible, but any optimistic views of Hip Hop as revolutionary might be a bit overstated, as it is restricted by capitalism and consumption patterns. Kosanovich emphasizes the importance of understanding Hip Hop's movement within a late capitalist economic structure and how this limits the movement. This is important because scholars often "over determine" the utopian and "revolutionary" promises of Hip Hop, that doesn't explain the reality of what's taking place.³⁶ This is not to say that opposition and resistance are not important elements of Hip Hop culture, because they absolutely are and have been, but more so to remind scholars that Hip Hop does exist "within, and not outside, late capital markets."³⁷

Late capitalism changed ways of consumption. It shifted consumption "away from products" and to production, "ultimately commodifying the process of production" itself.³⁸ When Hip Hop seeped into the mainstream, the cultural production of Hip Hop itself would now be commodified, leading to a new element of Hip Hop. Because Hip Hop emerged in the space of

³⁶Kevin Kosanovich, "Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop's Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism". *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 1-25.

³⁷Kevin Kosanovich, "Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop's Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism" *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 3-6.

³⁸Kevin Kosanovich, "Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop's Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism." *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 1-25.

late capitalism, during the construction of the postmodern city, “its socio-cultural and spatial practices must be understood as always already representing the material embodiment of consumption, the commodity.”³⁹ There was no way for Hip Hop to get around this reality. Its commodification was merely a result of its existence and even its success in a capitalist society.

Space is repeatedly highlighted as an important element of understanding Hip Hop and its place in American politics. Kasonovich locates the importance of space in this creation of socio-cultural spatial practices, arguing that the culture emerged from a “negative space” grounded in exclusion from the mainstream, facilitated by late capitalism, and “connected to mass production through the use of consumer commodities,” such as stereo equipment and records. The cultural production in Hip Hop operates on a loop, with its cultural production “enacted through the consumption of commodities, with the cultural consumption itself turning back into a commodity.”⁴⁰ For example, the experiential suffering, the deprivation of resources, and the harsh socio-economic circumstances, allowed for the creation of art in the form of Hip Hop, that was then consumed as a product. It had major commercial success, and so the environment that facilitated this success must stay the same, or “authentic,” in order to replicate the same product, which in this case is also the cultural production, and the experience of oppression of the ghettoized areas of urban decay.⁴¹

³⁹Kevin Kosanovich, “Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop’s Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 1-25.

⁴⁰Kevin Kosanovich, “Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop’s Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 25-34.

⁴¹Kevin Kosanovich, “Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop’s Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 11-34.

Kasonovich cites Marx's notion of "commodity fetishism" to argue that the "institutions and spokesmen of late capitalism attempt to convince everyone that their social interactions only take place as commodity exchanges."⁴² According to Marx's theory on commodity fetishism, "the real producers of commodities remain largely invisible,"⁴³ which holds true in this case, because this loop harms the producers of Hip Hop the most, and benefits the capitalist beneficiaries of the authentic and "ghetto" experience that Hip Hop comes out of. This places Hip Hop in a very peculiar, complicated position as both product and producer and commodifies the experiential suffering of poor Black and brown people under an oppressive system, therefore "rap and hip-hop become authentic representations of Blackness through idealized consumption practices."⁴⁴ On one hand, rappers and Hip Hop artists can become wealthy and powerful through the power of commodity. Take soon-to-be billionaire Jay Z, for example, who took advantage of the commodification of Hip Hop to create generational wealth and staunchly promoted and endorsed that path through his art. But at what socio-economic or political cost in the bigger picture?

2.3: Authenticity in Hip Hop

The concept of "authenticity" is an important element of Hip Hop noted by many scholars. Authenticity is "vital" to rap and Hip Hop and their marketability or "commercial viability," and the "ghetto," was the site of authenticity, because of its connection through space and culture to Hip Hop's creation.⁴⁵ When Hip Hop and rap is interpreted as the authentic Black experience, this

⁴²Kevin Kosanovich, "Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop's Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism". *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 11-14.

⁴³Dino Felluga, "Modules on Marx: On Fetishism." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. Purdue University. 2011.

⁴⁴Kevin Kosanovich, "Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop's Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism". *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 11-14.

⁴⁵Kevin Kosanovich, "Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop's Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism". *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 11-14.

“encourages a set of consumer consumption patterns supported by neoliberal economic policies that encourage the maintenance of ghetto-ized areas,” such as the South Bronx, in order to maintain the “authenticity” of the commodity that is Hip Hop.⁴⁶ Kosanovich argues that “conflation of authenticity with commodity shaped hip-hop as both advertisement and site of Blackness: the quest for the real ironically maintains the status quo,” meaning that the dire situation in the South Bronx should continue to replicate itself to preserve the authenticity of the commodity in a capitalist society.⁴⁷ Furthermore, as Rose points out, this idea of an “authentic” Black “ghetto” experience can and has been co-opted and appropriated by the white mainstream and has been a source of “white fabricated authenticity”⁴⁸ as an effort to improve marketability or commercial viability of an artist. Rose cites the controversy surrounding Vanilla Ice, a white rapper who pretended that he “grew up in the ghetto” and lied about his “shared experiences” with poor Black people in marginalized communities in an effort to validate his place in Hip Hop and make himself appear authentic so that he would also be profitable. Contradictions such as these that exist within Hip Hop should not be seen as a shocking or surprising element of Hip Hop, but are rather “central” to Hip Hop and other popular cultural articulations, that Rose argues is not unique to postmodernity, but a central aspect of “popular expression and thought”⁴⁹ in general. Rose writes that it is this contradictory nature of the “pleasure and social resistance”, the contradictions

⁴⁶Kevin Kosanovich, “Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop’s Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 15-17.

⁴⁷Kevin Kosanovich, “Re-Taking It to the Streets: Investigating Hip Hop’s Emergence in the Spaces of Late Capitalism”. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2008, 15-17.

⁴⁸Tricia Rose. “Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America” Hanover, NH: *University Press of New England*, 1994, 355-357.

⁴⁹Tricia Rose. “Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America” Hanover, NH: *University Press of New England*, 1994,355-357.

between the “progressive” and “non-progressive”⁵⁰ elements of Hip Hop that ought to be “confronted, theorized, and understood.” This work is a confrontation of those contradictions.

2.4: Space and Race in Hip Hop

By now, space has been mentioned many times, because it is an important aspect to Hip Hop politics. Race has also been mentioned, but there hasn’t been as much of a discussion on their interconnectedness in the Hip Hop movement. This section will dive more into the relationship between space and race in Hip Hop. Scholars Neely and Samura, in writing about the connections between race and space, use their work to define space as the following:

“Space is contested, the product of hegemonic struggle; fluid and historical, changing and created through history and experience; interactional and relational, processed and understood through “stretched-out social relations;” and defined by inequality and differences.”⁵¹

They note that these characteristics can also be applied to race. In New York in the 1970s, these characteristics were being applied to both race and space, and subsequently the racial and spatial tensions were high. In “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” George Lipsitz examines the urban space and the connection it has with race using New Orleans as his case study. Lipsitz points out that the United States is organized by a racial order that is segregated in which different races are separated by physical and geographic barriers like school district zones, zoning regulations, and the designs of transit systems as well as the social barriers like housing and lending

⁵⁰Tricia Rose. “Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America” Hanover, NH: *University Press of New England*, 1994, 355-357.

⁵¹Neely, Brooke, and Michelle Samura. “Social Geographies of Race: Connecting Race and Space.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, ProQuest Publishing, 2011, 1939-1943

discrimination and biased policing practices.⁵² Lipsitz's findings on race and space help explain the racial dynamics in the Bronx during this time period. Lipsitz details the existence of a white spatial imaginary that "views space primarily as a locus for the generation of exchange value," and is the "mechanism that distributes advantages unequally, further arguing that "landscape architects and other policy makers must work against the white spatial imaginary and the racial segregation it creates."⁵³ This white spatial imaginary is what can be said to have fueled the policy and planning that led to "white flight"⁵⁴ and then subsequent urban decay experienced in the Bronx.

In *Postmodern Geographies*, Edward Soja argues that a neoliberal city is best represented by the "dialectical relationship between social and spatial sites," which "explicate the economic and racial tensions within urban space expressed through unequal experiences of consumption and production."⁵⁵ This can help us to understand Hip Hop as a "cultural force commenting on, and producing spatial meaning."⁵⁶ Hip Hop was commenting on the space that was created by intentional urban decay, but creating space through culture, art, expression, experience and community. Hip Hop created and challenged space. It opposes state control of space, through the usage of public space to create art and culture, to spread knowledge to facilitate self-determination and resistance to hegemony, as exemplified by Afrika Bambaata's aforementioned initiatives, and to reclaim and build community and space.

⁵²George Lipsitz, "The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape. *Landscape Journal*, 26(1), University of Wisconsin Press. 2007, 10-23.

⁵³Katherine Elizabeth White, "We out here": Skateboarding, Segregation and Resistance in the Bronx. *Fordham University, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. 2015, 17-18.

⁵⁴Eli Lederhendler, "New York City, the Jews, and "The Urban Experience". *Studies in Contemporary Jewry. Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry*, 1999, 49-67.

⁵⁵Kevin Kosanovich "Making the Bronx move: Hip-hop culture and history from the Bronx river houses to the Parisian suburbs, 1951-1984. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2015, 128-131.

⁵⁶Kevin Kosanovich "Making the Bronx move: Hip-hop culture and history from the Bronx river houses to the Parisian suburbs, 1951-1984. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*. 2015, 128-131.

Soja explores the theoretical framework of the postmodern city, aims to understand the significance of space in modern social science, and exposes instances of intentional urban planning that leads to urban decay, as such with the Bronx. Soja uses the terms “flexible specialization, selective abandonment, and uneven geographical development,”⁵⁷ to describe the situations that create the postmodern city. During the 1970s, the economic markets were experiencing a transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, and multi-skilled workers and more advanced, capable technology was becoming more readily available, forcing the market to change. This new market demanded flexibility and the ability to adjust to changing demands. According to Scholar Kevin Kasonovich, using Soja’s perspective, flexible specialization “facilitated the creation and maintenance of suburban and inner-city core areas of industry.” It also “vertically disintegrated production sites anywhere deemed profitable, obviating any infrastructural maintenance responsibilities for the spaces previously developed for factory workers and their families.”⁵⁸ Selective abandonment assisted in “metropolizing” the city and surrounding suburbs “through expanding fragmentation of political jurisdictions and further decentralization of civil and commercial services.”⁵⁹ This flexible specialization allowed for flexible accumulation which resulted in “uneven economic development,” that “devastated formerly prosperous areas of the city-center, while once poor, peripheral areas become new centers of profit.”⁶⁰ This activated and resulted from selective abandonment. Selective abandonment can be understood in this case as the various circumstances that left parts of the Bronx literally in ashes. The construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, the

⁵⁷Edward Soja, “Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory. *Verso*. 1989.

⁵⁸Kevin Kasonovich “Making the Bronx move: Hip-hop culture and history from the Bronx river houses to the Parisian suburbs, 1951-1984. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*. 2015, 129-131.

⁵⁹Kevin Kasonovich “Making the Bronx move: Hip-hop culture and history from the Bronx river houses to the Parisian suburbs, 1951-1984. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*. 2015, 184-186.

⁶⁰Kevin Kasonovich “Making the Bronx move: Hip-hop culture and history from the Bronx river houses to the Parisian suburbs, 1951-1984. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*. 2015, 184-186.

intentional burning and abandoning of apartment buildings by landlords, the fleeing of the white, middle-class populations, the intentional deprivation of state and local resources, etc. These events damaged the centrality of the city, in which case, the state and local resources were then being poured into some areas, while other areas went neglected.⁶¹ Areas of the Bronx that faced abandonment and resource deprivation represented “not the failure, but instead the triumph of an economic system steeped in class privilege and power”⁶² The success of other parts of Boroughs like Manhattan were “rewarded with super-profits,” which helped to to pressure other states, cities, or regions to “imitate uneven development, guaranteeing that predatory economic policies produce spaces of superabundance and neglect.”⁶³ These were all consequences of the neoliberalization of the market that was happening around the world during this time period, creating our postmodern city in America.

CHAPTER 3: Findings and Discussions

3.1: General Findings

The method of this thesis is qualitative and exploratory. Its aim is to investigate Hip Hop as a Mode of Politics and understand its existence within capitalism more deeply. This project takes on the assumption that Hip Hop movement as politics has revolutionary potential, but that the potential is stymied by its existence as a commodity within capitalism. This assumption is reflected in the literature on Hip Hop through multi-faceted and interdisciplinary ways. The aim of this project is to synthesize different elements of Hip Hop politics to help understand it more as

⁶¹Kevin Kosanovich “Making the Bronx move: Hip-hop culture and history from the Bronx river houses to the Parisian suburbs, 1951-1984. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*. 2015, 184-186.

⁶²Kevin Kosanovich “Making the Bronx move: Hip-hop culture and history from the Bronx river houses to the Parisian suburbs, 1951-1984. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*. 2015, 184-186.

⁶³Kevin Kosanovich “Making the Bronx move: Hip-hop culture and history from the Bronx river houses to the Parisian suburbs, 1951-1984. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*. 2015, 275-278.

a whole. We can pull from the literature that Hip Hop is inherently political, it is a cultural form and a social movement, it is identity and community-based and it largely embodies African American culture, history and politics. What was missing from the literature previously was an updated, comprehensive literature that explains Hip Hop as a politics in depth, which is what I hoped to have accomplished. One of the major challenges of studying Hip Hop is the fact that as a subject in itself, it is so interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary inherently which can make it hard to narrow the research to specific elements of Hip Hop and Hip Hop Politics. There are so many varying implications of Hip Hop and so many elements and perspectives of it and within it that are worthy of their own individual analysis, so much so that a completely and truly comprehensive and whole review seems almost impossible. It sometimes seems that way with complicated subjects, which means that there is still much more work to be done. However, I hope that by reviewing the literature that I have, I can provide somewhat of a foundation or addition to the literature for those who want to learn more about Hip Hop's history and its implications for today's modern day Hip Hop movement, and hopefully add onto it.

3.2: The “And Latino” Problem

There is an issue throughout almost all of the literature that I found intriguing and worth noting. I will call this the “And Latino” problem in Hip Hop. There is a multi-disciplinary literature on Latino and Chicana and Indigenous influence Hip Hop culture that I will not be able to explore at this time for the purposes and scope of this thesis but what can be said about it in relation to it is that it is largely absent from the general literature on Hip Hop. Hip Hop is often, justifiably, framed as Black, and even more specifically an African American movement. But yet, in every piece of literature that discusses the politics and history of Hip Hop, “Latinos” or “Hispanics” are

mentioned as residents of the South Bronx, of victims of the systemic neglect and the implications of the development of the post-industrial city and the quest to modernity. They were in the aforementioned Patterson houses on 3rd Ave in the Bronx, they were B-boys and B-girls, rappers, MCs — they were at the block parties — and they contributed to the movement and the culture. Yet in all instances, the major collective identity that is highlighted in Hip Hop as per the literature is an African American identity. Latinx or Hispanic peoples are looped into sentences describing Hip Hop politics as “African Americans and Latinos,” “African American and Hispanics,” yet most literatures aim to understand issues that center around the concepts of race and Blackness. Because the categories “Latinx” or “Hispanic” do not specify a racial category, this can be confusing and it leads me to have questions about the place for “Latinx” and “Hispanic” persons in Hip Hop literature.

There are a number of different quotes from the literature review that exemplify what I described above. From Lamotte, 2014, regarding the Block Parties that housed Hip Hop’s artistic and cultural forms:

“While clashes between neighborhood gangs intensified in the 1970s and 1980s, the ceasefire of 1971 reconciled Black and Latino gangs in the South Bronx. This peace treaty had a profound impact on the South Bronx, particularly because of the personal involvement of Afrika Bambaataa, a young warlord of the Black Spades (one of the larger gangs in the South Bronx, presided over by Bam Bam). In 1975, Bambaataa launched the Universal Zulu Nation which put on evening parties — the block parties — mobilizing gang discipline and support in organizing them. This movement was the core of hip-hop

culture as it brought together its four key components: DJing, MCing, Bboying and graffiti.”

From Naison, “From Doo Wop to Hip Hop: The Bittersweet Odyssey of African Americans in the South Bronx” on the experiences of Bronx families living in the Patterson Project:

“When the project first opened, children who lived in Patterson experienced a level of communal supervision that is difficult to imagine today. The families who lived in the development, 90% of whom were Black and Latino, took responsibility for raising one another’s children.”⁶⁴

Naison interestingly frequently refers to Black and Latino neighborhoods of the South Bronx to describe the experiences of African Americans. In “Styles of Struggle,” Curtis tells stories of Puerto Rican B-boys and activists who partook in this “multi-racial freestyle politics” that resisted the “outside imperialists trying to tell the Puerto Rican South Bronx what to do.”⁶⁵ So, while the Hip Hop movement addresses racial inequality, it also might complicate racial discourse a bit. What makes this even more confusing, is that Latinx or Hispanic is not race specific. Latinx and Hispanic persons can be Black, they can also be white, and they can also be neither. So where do they fit? How and why do Latinos and African Americans get grouped together despite having different circumstances? And how can we explain the continuities between the circumstances, their interconnectedness as well as their conflicts? I am not exactly sure what to do with this problem

⁶⁴Mark Naison, “From Doo Wop to Hip Hop: The bittersweet odyssey of African Americans in the South Bronx.” In *Socialism and Democracy*. Taylor & Francis Group 2004, 37-49.

⁶⁵Cutler Curtis Edwards, “Styles of Struggle: Community Organizing, Youth Culture, and Radical Politics in New York City, 1968-1981” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2014, 225-226.

or how to address it, but I am aware of it, and assume that it has to do with the fact that the Black and white racial divide is a tool of even larger forms of division; like class divisions, but this is a hypothesis that I will have to test another time.

Conclusion

Hip Hop is an incredibly interesting, nuanced subject that deserves academic attention and care and I hope, through my work, to provide some of the academic attention and care that it deserves. There is a lot to uncover in Hip Hop's movement, in the United States and beyond. I thought that the best way to really understand Hip Hop was to start from the very beginning in order to understand its origins, history, pioneers, and politics. The South Bronx case study allows to be fully immersed in the complexities of Hip Hop and its construction within late capitalism. It also allows us to see Hip Hop's limitations and its weaknesses. The contradictions that exist in Hip Hop do not mean that Hip Hop as a movement or culture does not promote progression or participate in progressive politics, but its story does reflect the reality of the pretty severe restrictions underserved Americans face as citizens of a capitalist society that paints itself to the world as "free." There is so much more work to be done however, on Hip Hop's history, present, and future. I hope that by starting with the history, I can build my way up to having a better understanding of where it is headed, or where it can be headed, and what role it can play in reducing, or reproducing, inequality. In the 1970s, though the genre had major success, Hip Hop was still produced and consumed on a much more local, smaller level than it is today, so this historical review should be read with that in mind. Today, Hip Hop is global and is one of, if not the biggest, and most profitable music genres of our time. The implications of this on race and identity politics in the United States and around the world is intriguing and can be addressed down

the line in my research. We know now that Hip Hop can be liberating, but it can also be restricting, and can reproduce the inequality that it aims to abolish because of the economic structure it was created within.

Hip Hop was (and is, though it has changed through time) a movement that is inherently political from its inception, created out of a struggle for space and resources and representation in a city that was set on driving divisions between New York's wealthiest and whitest communities and New York's poorest Black and brown communities. New York City was and is a unique, socioeconomically diverse landscape, and in the 1970s the specific economic, cultural and political situations that aligned in New York City made a "perfect storm" or sorts for Hip Hop to be successful as a movement. It is fair to say that Hip Hop could not have been created in rural Tennessee or Suburban Ohio. The "city" and what it symbolizes and embodies are central to the discussion of the politics of Hip Hop and the "urban experience" is foundational to the stories that Hip Hop's history tells.

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