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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that hip-hop music is an effective way to reach previously marginalized urban youth and to teach them critical and analytical skills necessary for succeeding in school. It suggests that students learn more effectively when motivated, and hip-hop music is a tremendous motivating force for urban youth. It is also a legitimate voice of urban youth resistance and a viable literary genre worthy of serious academic contemplation. The first section shows how students are more inclined to develop literacy skills if they have a cultural frame, which will help them understand the material presented during instruction. The second section argues that rap music and urban youth are closely aligned, discussing the literary viability of rap texts, their worthiness for serious academic study, and their ability to be used to scaffold complex literary concepts. The third section looks at a high school unit that was created to incorporate elements of popular culture as well as to facilitate the critical understanding of canonical literary texts. The fourth section initiates a discussion of the effectiveness of the unit, suggests possible strategies for interacting with the data, and brainstorms the implications of this information for future research. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

Using Hip-Hop Culture as a Bridge to Canonical Poetry Texts in an Urban Secondary English Class

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Introduction

As English teachers at an urban public high school, we bore daily witness to students who, despite showing extraordinary intellectual abilities, were failing or significantly underachieving in mostly all of their academic classes. After years and countless students, it became obvious that the problem rested, not with the students or their intellectual capacities, but, rather, with the school's ability to reach the students, foster and develop their academic skills, and help them reach their academic potential. Particularly, in the English classes, we began to notice that students who could critically analyze the complex and often richly metaphoric and symbolic hip-hop music they listened to and then effectively articulate that analysis, were failing to exhibit these same analytical skills in class when relating to canonical texts. Through observations and study, we began to develop the hypothesis that hip-hop music could be used as a vehicle for these urban youth to develop and express their critical literacy skills which they could then transfer to other "literary texts". The pedagogical implications became immediately obvious as we began to ask ourselves whether, through teaching hip-hop music as a literary genre, we could scaffold and impart critical literacy skills to youth who have often been labeled as "non- academic" or "semi-literate".

This paper will attempt to argue that hip-hop music is indeed an effective way to reach previously marginalized urban youth and teach them

the critical and analytical skills they will need in order to be successful in the academy. It will also outline and engage in a preliminary analysis of an intervention that we taught that incorporated hip-hop music in a unit where it was juxtaposed against canonical poetry.

Following the reasoning of several literacy theorists (Ferdman 1990, Freire 1970, 1987, Mahiri 1998), we argue for a broader definition of school-based literacy that encompasses cultural values, self-awareness, and the development of a critical consciousness. Guided by this premise, we analyze a high school English unit that utilizes hip-hop culture as a bridge to canonical poetry texts.

The paper will be divided into four sections. "Critical Literacy, Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Identity" attempts to show that students are more inclined to develop literacy skills if they have a cultural frame, which will aid them in understanding the material presented during instruction. We conclude this section by arguing that urban students will be more motivated to develop literacy skills in the context of hip-hop music because of its culturally relevant subject matter and will be more successful in acquiring these skills because of their cultural frame.

"Hip-Hop Music: The Urban Youth's Voice of Resistance" makes the argument that rap music and urban youth culture are closely aligned. For over two decades, many of the most famous rappers have either been declared or have declared themselves as spokespersons for urban youth and the dilemmas they face, Common themes in this era have included resistance

to established authorities that the rappers have frequently ridiculed and held responsible for the urban plight. This section also discusses the literary viability of rap texts, their worthiness for serious academic study, and their ability to be used to scaffold complex literary concepts.

"The Poet in Society: An Intervention Model" looks at a high school unit that was created to incorporate elements of popular culture as well as facilitate the critical understanding of canonical literary texts. "A Unit Analysis" seeks to initiate a discussion of the effectiveness of the unit, suggests possible strategies for interacting with the data, and brainstorms the implication of this paper for future research.

Critical Literacy, Critical Pedagogy, and Cultural Identity

Ferdman (1990) argues that cultural diversity has significant implications for the process of becoming literate. Often, the failure to develop literacy skills stems not from a lack of intelligence, but from the inaccessibility of the school curriculum to students who do not adhere to the "dominant" or "mainstream" culture. This inaccessibility is an outcome of the failure of schools to effectively bridge the contrasting home and school cultures of urban youth:

> Literacy involves facility in manipulating the symbols that codify and represent the values, beliefs, and norms of the culture-- the same symbols that incorporate the culture's representation of reality, (187).

Present in Ferdman's analysis of the definition of literacy is an accurate assessment of underlying factors in a student's struggle to draw similarities between an analysis of their popular culture and the dominant culture as it is manifested in the school curriculum. Given that literacy is culturally framed, he argues, those students whose culture is valued or promoted through literacy instruction in schools, will be more inclined to obtain a high level of literacy than those students whose culture is not valued or promoted. Implicit in Ferdman's argument is that the lack of consideration given to the cultures and cultural values of children who are members of ethnic minority groups leads to unequal educational achievement based on ethnicity.

Freire (1970) discusses the importance of developing literacy as a vehicle to critical consciousness among peoples who have been historically oppressed. A key element of Freire's argument is that literacy must initially be taught in the language of the people:

> Critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation. The content of that dialogue can and should vary in accordance with historical conditions and the level at which the oppressed perceive reality (47).

Freire and Macedo (1987) discuss the importance of reconstituting a radical view of literacy, in conjunction with radical pedagogy, that revolves around the importance of naming and transforming those ideological and social conditions that undermine the possibility for forms of community and public

life organized around the imperatives of a critical democracy. An emancipatory theory of literacy points to the need to develop an alternative discourse and critical reading of how ideology, culture, and power work within the late capitalist societies to limit, disorganize, and marginalize the more critical and radical everyday experiences and common sense perceptions of individuals. Literacy is part of the process of becoming self-critical about the historically constructed nature of one's experience. To be able to name one's experience is part of what it meant to "read" the world and to begin to understand the political nature of the limits and possibilities that make up the larger society. To be literate is not to be free; it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history, and future. As part of the discourse of narrative and agency, critical literacy suggests using history as a form of liberating memory. History means recognizing the figural traces of untapped potentialities as well as sources of suffering that constitutes one's past. A radical theory of literacy needs to be constructed around a dialectical theory of voice and empowerment:

> Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. Reading the word is not merely preceded by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. Words should be laden with the meaning of the people's existential experience, and not of the teacher's experience. A critical reading of reality constitutes an act of what Gramsci calls counterhegemony (36).

It is Freire's assertion that pedagogy helps to impart or uncover the literacy in oppressed people. When challenged by a critical educator, students begin to understand that the more profound dimension of their freedom lies exactly in the recognition of constraints that can be overcome. They can discover for themselves, in the process of becoming more and more critical, that it is impossible to deny the constitutive power of their consciousness in the social practice in which they participate. The radical pedagogy is dialectical and has as its goal to enable students to become critical of the hegemonic practices that have shaped their experiences and perceptions in hopes of freeing themselves from the bonds of these dominating ideologies. In order for this to happen, learners must be involved in tranformative discourse, which legitimizes the wishes, decisions, and dreams of the people involved.

Freire uses Popular Culture Notebooks in Sao Tome and Principe in creating exercises that validate the worlds and experiences of the learners' communities. He argues strongly for the use of the native language as a prerequisite to the development of any literacy campaign that purports to serve as the means to a critical appropriation of one's own culture and history. Educators must fully understand the broad meaning of student's empowerment, one that enables students to interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming the wider social order. Student's language must not be viewed as subordinated and antagonistic to the dominant language. Educators must develop literacy programs that move

away from traditional approaches that emphasize the acquisition of mechanical skills. The reader's development of a critical comprehension of the text, and the sociohistorical context to which it refers, becomes and important factor in Freire's notions of literacy and Critical Pedagogy.

It follows that, for the critical educator, hip-hop music and culture are a logical bridge between popular culture and the school culture. Given its academic nature and cultural relevance for many urban youth, hip-hop music may provide the necessary cultural frame from which to start effective discussions of literature and literary terminology. Similarly, as its widespread appeal (as evidenced by record sales and dominance of the media) indicates, rap music is popular among urban youth and students will more than likely be more motivated to study rap text than more "traditional literary texts.

Hip-Hop Music: The Urban Youth's Voice of Resistance

"Just as F. Scott Fitzgerald lived in the jazz age, just as Dylan and Jimi Hendrix were among the rulers of the age of rock, it could be argued that we are living in the age of hip-hop (Farley 1999)." Farley argues that the creative people who are talking about youth culture in a way that makes sense, happen to be rappers and the youth are responding in many ways. Hip-hop artists sold more than 81 million CDs, tapes and albums in 1998, more than in any other genre of music. Although hip-hop got its start in black American, more than 70% of albums are purchased by whites. Taking the lead from the young generation, major corporations such as clothing brands and household products are creating clothing or advertising schemes that cater to the "hip-

hop generation". Even mainstream Hollywood, in the case of Warren Beatty's *Bulworth*, is dealing with issues related to hip-hop. Although the music is largely criticized by politicians, religious groups, and some women's groups, its proponents claim that it is here to stay as it represents the rebellious voice of youth and points to problems that this generation and all Americans face on a daily basis.

A strong argument can be made that hip-hop music is the representative voice of urban youth as the genre was created by and for urban youth. Tabb Powell (1991) cites:

> [Rap] emerged from the streets of inner-city neighborhoods as a genuine reflection of the hopes, concerns, and aspirations of urban Black youth in this, the last quarter of the 20th century. Rap is essentially a homemade, street-level musical genre... Rap lyrics concentrate primarily on the contemporary African American experience...Every issue within the Black community is subject to exposition in the rap arena. Hit rap tunes have broached touchy subjects such as sex, sexism, racism, and crime... Rap artists, they contend, 'don't talk that love stuff, but [rather] educate the listeners (245).

Although for nearly two decades now, rap music has been labeled as the voice of the street or the urban voice, it was in the late 1980's, with the debut of N.W.A's (Niggas With Attitude) *Straight Outta Compton* (1987), Public Enemy's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988), and Boogie Down Production's *Criminal Minded* (1987), however, that rap music began

to proliferate as a legitimate voice of urban resistance (George 1999). What these three groups brought to the rap genre was a blunt, yet accurate portrayal of the urban lifestyle and a harsh, biting critique of the government and its institutions (i.e. police departments, schools, etc.).

Baker (1993) discusses the genre of rap music and gangster rap in particular as having an, "anti-establishment expressivity that has scarcely been matched (33)." His work refers to the prophetic nature of rap artist in their analysis of the urban communities:

> [Rappers] had been prophetic with respect to tensions between black urban youth and metropolitan police authorities. It was precisely the type of jury-exonerated violence against the black Rodney King that urban rap had in mind when it claimed that police justice was but another name for young- black- male victimization. And the fiery violence of the spring of 1992 in Los Angeles was just the kind of "armed response" that N.W.A. had prophesied in its versions of the strength of "street knowledge" recorded on *Straight Outta Compton* (34).

Indeed, during and immediately following the Los Angeles Insurrection of 1992, many rappers were called to appear on talk shows, be interviewed by news media, and generally speak as the representative voice of urban youth. In his 1993 album Predator, Ice Cube, former rapper for N.W.A., proclaims himself a prophet of the urban dilemma. In a track that records a mock interview, Ice Cube tells the interviewer:

Interviewer: Do you think sometimes those images and those lyrics help white folks justify

their continual racism against us?

Cube: I speak in a perspective as..uh..brothers...what we need to do is look in the mirror. I do want the white community to understand our community more and see what..uh..the things they've done to us in the past are still affecting us now, mentally...everything I said on records before the riots...anything you want to know about the riots was in the records before the riots. All you had to do was go to the Ice Cube library and pick a record and it would have told you.

Interviewer: In other words, it's almost like a warning or prophecy?

Cube: I've given so many warnings on what's going to happen. If we don't get these things straight in our lives...the clashes...then, you know, Armageddon is near.

Not only does Ice Cube proclaim himself a prophet and spokesperson when discussing the relationship between his rap lyrics and the Los Angeles Insurrection, but he also alludes to the educational purpose of his music. According to Ice Cube, his music has a message for whites and blacks. He is not only trying to entertain, but to inform. He even jokingly refers to the "Ice Cube Library" indicating that he feels his music is worthy of careful study and analysis.

In their 1987 album *It Takes A Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back*, Flavor Flav, a rapper in the group Public Enemy answers a formal Anglo-sounding voice which states:

" You're quite hostile!"

Flavor Flav's response is:

" I gotta right to be hostile, my people being persecuted!" (Public Enemy 1987)

As the titles (of the album and the song) imply, the members of Public Enemy have proclaimed themselves as prophets of the rage and frustration of urban youth. Also indicated in the album title, Public Enemy points to the

government, its institutions, and the blatant racism of its citizens as the source of the problems experienced by these urban youth. Other tracks on this album include: "Countdown to Armageddon", "Bring the Noise", "Don't Believe the Hype", "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos", and "Rebel Without a Pause". The tone of the songs are embittered, yet determined as Chuck D, the lead rapper, emphatically projects in the chorus:

" Clear the way for the prophets of rage!"

Rose (1991) discusses the wide impact of Public Enemy and its music:

> For many observers, the advent of the group Public Enemy marked the emergence of rap as a political cultural form; PE as a point of enlightenment as it were. The success of their "A Nation of Millions" (1988), ushered in a new rap aesthetic; gold chains are out, African medallions in; pride in oneself is pride in Black unity (276)

Rose (1991) also discusses the need for a group such as Public Enemy to help young people make sense of the conflicts in their daily lives which are a result of being born into an unwanted element of society:

> Indeed, hip -hop artists articulate a range of counter-reactions to the range of institutional policing faced by many young African Americans...Young African Americans are positioned in fundamentally antagonistic relationships to the institutions that most prominently frame and constrain their lives. The public school system, the police, and the popular media perceive and construct them

as a dangerous internal element in urban America (279).

Hip-hop music is one of few popular media seriously challenging the stereotypes that attempt to encapsulate urban youth and offer an alternative hypothesis that affirms their legitimacy. In blaming majority society, however, hip-hop artists often incur the wrath of these major institutions that view them as a threat to society for the subversive nature of their lyrics. For these reasons, asserts Rose (1994), many venue owners are reticent to allow rap concerts. The fear of 15,000 screaming urban youth of color being taught about the truth of their realities and, suddenly, becoming very angry all in the same place is just too much for many of them.

KRS One (Chris Parker), rapper and producer of Boogie Down Productions (BDP), often refers to himself as a poet/ teacher/philosopher rather than a rapper. In BDP's 1986 debut album *Criminal Minded*, Parker artfully depicts many of the social ills that urban youth frequently encounter such as: poverty, homelessness, violence, drugs and racism. For instance, Parker devotes an entire song to the discussion of his hometown, the South Bronx in New York City. KRS One begins Poetry, the initial selection:

Well now you're forced
To listen to the teacher and the lesson
class is in session
so you can stop guessing..
a visual picture
sort of a poetic and rhythm-like mixture (BDP 1987)

KRS invites his audience to listen and heed his teaching, which he calls poetry (as opposed to rap). He immediately establishes his relationship with the audience (usually urban youth) as that of a teacher to a classroom of students. Another selection includes "The P is free" where Parker speaks of the deleterious influence of drugs in the urban communities as he proclaims:

> The girlies is free, but the crack cost money (BDP 1987)

Young females selling their bodies for crack was a tragic, yet common image in urban communities in 1987, not to say that the problem has been completely eradicated. Other themes addressed by BDP are: police corruption, safe sex, African History, and, of course, taking out sucka emcees! Such harsh experiences, as powerfully delineated by Boogie Down Productions in their debut album, can coerce even the best of us into becoming criminal minded. In a later album entitled *Edutainment*, Parker explicitly states that it is his goal to be both an entertainer and an educator, as the title implies.

Few groups and albums have been more influential in establishing rap music as the voice of resistance for urban youth than N.W.A. and their 1988 debut *Straight Outta Compton*. Eazy E, a rapper in the group, introduces the album by informing the audience:

> You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge

Eazy E's statement is a powerful one for several reasons. First, it recognizes that an understanding of what occurs in the street requires some sort of knowledge or study. Eazy E also acknowledges that this knowledge of the

street lifestyle and an understanding of why things happen as they do will be a source of strength for urban youth. With this knowledge they will be able to stand and fight against racism and racist institutions as the group members constantly urge. Whether through violence, retaliation, or public exposure, both knowledge and strength are required to challenge the institutions that shape and control our lives. When the group members yell, "Fuck the Police!" in a track that bears this title from this album, they demonstrate and encourage explicit resistance against a sanctioned societal authority. While it is one thing to question an institution of the United States government, publicly cursing this institution through song is entirely another enterprise. It is the most vulgar of curses reserved for one of the most sacred and powerful institutions in society. It is the ultimate act of resistance by teenagers who, by their own admission, have a serious attitude. N.W.A.'s invocation to "Fuck the Police" indicates a high level of critical literacy as these teenage rappers are able to, after observing and analyzing their own community, label the root of the problem as something outside of themselves. Even more, they lay the blame at the feet of the government under which they live. As future generations of youth listen to the lyrics on this album, they too will be forced to analyze their treatment by police officers to decide whether to concur with N.W.A.'s statement as countless others already have.

In addition to merely being a voice in the urban community, all of the aforementioned rappers considered themselves as educators and saw at least a portion of their mission as raising the consciousness of their communities.

As mentioned by Freire (1970), the raising of critical consciousness in people who have been oppressed is a first step in helping them to obtain critical literacy.

Among these rappers/spokespersons runs a recurring motif of revolution or Armageddon, a final showdown between the forces of good and evil. Both Ice Cube and Chuck D refer to an Armageddon type battle being inevitable without considerable change. Another motif present in the lyrics of these rappers is the charge for urban youth not to get down on themselves or blame themselves for the past, but to understand the larger systemic forces at work. Whether it's N.W.A's indictment of the police, or Flavor Flav's critique of health professionals in "911" which he calls a joke for not serving the urban communities, such messages by rappers, who are undisputed icons among urban youth, can serve to foster self esteem and political awareness in addition to bitterness and rage. Finally, the portrayal of the urban community is not all negative or pessimistic. Many rappers discuss a sense of brother or sisterhood in their music. They express loyalty and commitment to rectifying injustices and uplifting the community. Also promoted is a culture that includes its own language, dress, and customs all largely promoted and influenced by rap music.

The influence of rap as a voice of resistance for urban youth continues to this day both from the previously mentioned rappers all of whom (with one exception) are still in the rap-making business and recent newcomers such as Lauryn Hill, Nas, Wyclef Jean and Mos Def who endeavor to bring an

accurate depiction of the urban situation to yet another generation of rap listeners.

Baker (1993) argues for the legitimization of hip-hop culture and rap music as a site of intellectual study. Baker contextualizes rap music in the fight against poverty, racism, and oppression and places hip-hop culture at the forefront of contemporary black studies. Baker contends that rap music is an expression and articulation of urban culture. Universities, however are notoriously disconnected from everyday life and "White and Western" in orientation and thought, for obviously self-interested reasons, shy away from the study of rap music. This comes at a time when universities, as a result of the 1960s Free Speech and Civil Rights movements, are more diverse than ever before and are logical spaces for developing the conversations that a study of rap music would engender. Rap music, however, faces a stiff challenge from PC activist who fear that its intrusion into the academic scene would symbolize an end to the purity of the academy. In addition, the response of conservative America has been to label the hip-hop artists as gangsters and blame them for instigating or inciting acts of violence in urban communities while the music has been written off as overly violent and sexual noise. Baker argues that academics shy away from a study of rap music because they are afraid to tackle a form that is predominantly young, black, and male (they may also lose some ownership of the role of expert). Baker uses the examples of N.W.A. and Public Enemy as rap groups that speak to the rage and anger in urban black America. He corroborates the assertions of

George (1999) and Rose (1994) that, after the LA Insurrection of 1992, talk show hosts were turning to popular rappers as "experts" on the political and sociological climate of urban America. In this manner, hip-hop was legitimated as the authentic voice of urban America. It is also, according to Baker, a site of young urban resistance in the 1990s. Black studies scholars, in studying rap, must historically contextualize rap music and its forms. They must, in his estimation, theorize the resonances of the form[1]. Black Studies has been remiss in its relationship to contemporary black urban culture. In exploring the pedagogical possibilities of rap music, Baker uses an example of DJs employing two turntables to cut a twenty-second sample of a song as emblematic of postmodernism and dubs hip-hop as the classic black sound:

> It is the 'in effect' archive where postmodernism has been dopely sampled for the international nineties. It is the job of Black Studies to provide an adequate understanding, (100). "

According to Lipsitz (1994), Queen Latifah, in her 1989 album "Ladies First", draws on the diasporic history of black people around the world to fashion an affirmative representation of women of African descent. In an American culture increasingly dismissive of African-American appeals for justice, dignity, and opportunity as 'minority' concerns, Latifah's deployment of images from the African diaspora demonstrated that the 'minority' populations of the U.S.A. are part of the global majority who have been

[1] Here, we take some issue as to the legitimacy of black academics to do this for rappers and not vice versa. Although Baker does grant that the scholars will not be instant experts, he never

victimized and oppressed by Euro-American racism and imperialism. Similarly, Afrika Bambaataa, recognizing the despair of urban youth in a world where they were unwanted and economically marginalized, sought to encourage positive outlets for the pain through rap music, graffiti and break dancing. This triumvirate of urban popular cultural expression became the foundation of hip-hop culture. Bambaataa and Latifah, claims Lipsitz, testify to the vitality of diasporic intimacy in the Atlantic world. Their efforts are part of an international dialogue built on the imagination and ingenuity of slum dwellers from around the globe suffering from the effects of "the international austerity economy imposed on urban areas by transnational corporations" (27). The diasporic conversation within hip-hop provides a powerful illustration of the potential for popular culture to carry images, ideas, and icons of enormous political importance between cultures. Despite their commodification by the capitalist music industry, Lipsitz feels that these expressions serve as exemplars of the post-colonial culture with relevance to the rise of new social movements emerging in response to the imperatives of global capital and its resultant oppression. Diasporic intimacy secures a space for oppositional expressions that have been obliterated by the mass media and elected politicians. It speaks to the potential of persons from the margins to, through popular music, express democratic visions and play a meaningful role in deconstructing and reconstructing our world.

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refers to the rap artists themselves as scholars.

Giroux (1996) addresses the crisis confronting youth, whom he labels a generation under siege, where they are enmeshed in a culture of violence coded by race and class. He speaks to the negative connotations of youth culture promoted in popular media that propel youth toward mistrust, alienation, misogyny, violence, apathy, and the development of fugitive cultures. This same media has commercialized the working class body and criminalized black youth. Critical pedagogues, he argues, must consider popular film and music as serious sites for social knowledge to be discussed, interrogated, and critiqued. Whether the power in its messages can be used for good or ill, few can dispute the impact of popular culture in the lives of working class, urban youth. Giroux promotes a synthesis of critical pedagogy and cultural studies to gain a critical understanding of how youth are being constructed differently within a popular culture that is simultaneously oppressive and resistant and represents violence as a legitimate practice to define youth identity. In making a case for using cultural studies as the conceptual frame for analyzing the contemporary problems of youth, Giroux states:

> Cultural studies, with its ambiguous founding moments spread across multiple continents and diverse institutional spheres, has always been critically attentive to the changing conditions influencing the socialization of youth and the social and economic contexts producing such changes. The self and social formation of diverse youth subcultures mediated by popular cultural forms remains a prominent concern of cultural studies (15).

Cultural studies offers educators a critical language through which to analyze and critique, yet it is incomplete without critical pedagogy as a mode of cultural criticism. Educators, says Giroux, must become public intellectuals who adeptly employ this language of critique combined with a questioning pedagogy to help youth make sense of the dangerous and damaging messages sent to them through popular media.

Mahiri (1998) builds upon the literacy theorists and the critical pedagogues to contend that teachers can become sources of resistance to the ideology and practices of cultural domination and exploitation that permeate institutional structures in this society by working to better understand and build on the authentic experiences of students who have been marginalized by the educational process. This can be achieved by the creation of the counter-hegemonic curricula that Freire (1987) advocates. His work examines African American culture and youth or popular culture as sites where young people have forged a common identity manifested in dress, language use, music, video games, and common heroes. It is Mahiri's argument that aspects of popular culture can act as unifying and equalizing forces in culturally diverse classrooms and that African American and youth cultural sources for curricula can motivate learning of traditional subject matter as well.

We have attempted to show from the research that students are able to more effectively learn when motivated and hip-hop music is a tremendous

motivating force for urban youth. Also, hip-hop music is a legitimate voice of urban youth resistance, and a viable literary genre worthy of serious academic contemplation. The implications for urban secondary English teachers using hip-hop music to impart critical literacy skills to urban youth are endless. For instance, Lee (1992), in a south side Chicago study, uses signifying as a bridge to teaching literary interpretation. In the same manner, hip-hop texts can be used to scaffold literary terms and concepts and ultimately literary interpretations. From a text such as Nas' "Affirmative Action" can be taught metaphor, irony, tone, diction, and point of view. Also, hip-hop songs and albums can be analyzed for themes, motifs, plot and character development. It is very possible to perform a feminist or postmodernist critique of hip-hop texts, the genre as a whole, or sub genres such as gangster rap. Once learned, knowledge of this language of interpretation can be applied to any text. A metaphor is the same whether for Nas or T.S. Eliot. If the ultimate goal is for students to be able to analyze complex literary texts as it was for Lee, hip-hop music can be seen a bridge linking the seemingly vast span between the streets and the world of academics.

Camitta (1993) discusses a study in which she uses vernacular writing of adolescent culture to teach literacy skills. Students, she found, were more motivated to write for social purposes or in a more "comfortable" and culturally relevant language. Hip-hop music can be the starting point for discussions about language and vernacular or it can be used to model creative writing or poetry in adolescent vernacular. Secondary students may

ultimately write and analyze their own poems or raps written in adolescent vernacular.

Hip-hop music, given its thematic nature, can be used as a springboard to launch critical discussions about contemporary issues facing urban youth. Provocative rap texts can be brought into the classrooms and discussion topics may be produced form a listening/reading of the text. These discussions may lead to more thoughtful analysis and, eventually expository writing. Perhaps the students will listen to the tapes or CD's at home and bring a critical question to class for discussion. For public speaking and presentation possibilities, students can be assigned to portray famous rappers who have been invited to a forum on teen violence. Other students, acting as the press, can ask questions to the rappers who must delineate their responses based on the philosophies set forth in their rap lyrics.

In following the arguments of Freire (1970, 1987), teaching hip-hop music of resistance can be viewed as a vehicle to developing the critical consciousness in urban youth. Analyzing the critical, yet controversial music of N.W.A., Public Enemy, and Nas may lead to conscious-raising discussions, essays, and research projects attempting to locate an explanation for the current state of affairs for urban youngsters. The knowledge reflected in these lyrics could engender discussions of esteem, power, place, and purpose or encourage students to further their own knowledge of urban sociology and politics. The political and sociological implications of rap can also be scaffold for the purpose of discussion and research. In this way, hip-hop music may

stand on its own merit in the academy and be a worthy subject of study in its own right rather than necessarily leading to something more "acceptable" like a Shakespeare text. It can also be used, however, as a bridge between urban cultures and the literary canon.

Given these theoretical foundations, an intervention project was planned with three objectives: (1) to analyze the viability of utilizing these elements of popular culture to help serve as a scaffold of the critical and analytical skills that the youth already possess, and (2) to assess the potential for providing students with the awareness and confidence they need to transfer these skills into/onto the literary texts from the canon. The third objective was to determine the capacity of this approach to enable students to critique the messages sent to them through a popular cultural medium that permeates their everyday life.

The Poet in Society: An Intervention Model

Given both its cultural and academic relevance, the unit was designed to, by incorporating rap music into a "traditional" senior English poetry unit: increase motivation and participation in discussions and assignments, teach critical essay writing and literary terminology in the context of, among other types of poetry, rap music, place rap music historically and socially and discuss its inception as a response to urban post industrialism, encourage youth to view elements of popular culture through a critical lens and to critique messages sent to them through popular media, and to help students

understand the intellectual integrity, literary merit, and social critique contained in elements of their own youth culture.

There were several goals and objectives for this unit that combine our simultaneous agendas of tapping into popular culture and facilitating literacy development. To accomplish this, we needed to cover the poetry of the Elizabethan Age, the Puritan Revolution, and the Romantics which were a part of the district-mandated curriculum for 12th grade English and which they will be expected to have a knowledge on the AP Exam and college English. It was also important to gain a greater understanding of the poets in the context of the literary and historical periods in which they wrote and to gain a greater understanding of the role poetry plays as a critique of its contemporary society.

In addition to a critical exposure to the literary canon, we felt it important to concentrate on the development of issues and ideas presented in poetry and song as a vehicle to expository writing. Other objectives were to: develop oral and written debate skills, the ability to work in groups, and make public, formal presentations, teach students how to critique a poem/song in a critical essay, help students to develop note taking skills in lectures and presentations, and to help students to become comfortable critiquing and writing in different poetic forms such as the sonnet, elegy, and ballad.

We started out the unit with an overview of poetry in general attempting to re-define poetry and the role of a poet in society. We emphasized the importance of understanding the historical period in which a

poem was written to come to a deep interpretation of the poem. In the introductory lecture, we laid out all of the historical/ literary periods that would be covered in the unit (Elizabethan, Puritan Revolution, Romantics, and Metaphysical Poets from England, and the Civil War, Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Movement, and Post Industrial Revolution in the United States). It was our intention to place rap music and the post industrial revolution right along side these other historical periods and poems so that the students would be able to use a period and genre of poetry they were familiar with as a lens with which to examine the other literary works and also to encourage the students to re-evaluate the manner in which they view elements of their popular culture.

The second major portion of the unit was the group presentation of a poem and rap song. The groups were commissioned to prepare a justifiable interpretation of their poem and song with relation to its specific historical and literary period and to analyze the linkages between the poem and song. There were eight groups for this portion who were, after a week of preparation, each given a day to present to the class and have their arguments critiqued by their peers. The groups were assigned as follows:

Group	Poem	Song
1	Kubla Khan", Coleridge	"If I Ruled the World", Nas
2	"Lovesong of J.Alfed Prufrock", Eliot	"The Message", Grand Master Flash
3	"O Me! O Life!", Whitman	"Don't Believe the Hype"Public Enemy
4	"Immigrants In Our Own Land", Baca	"The World Is a Ghetto", Geto Boys
5	"Sonnet 29" Shakespeare	"Affirmative Action", Nas

6	"The Canonization", Donne	"Manifest", Refugee Camp
7	" Repulse Bay", Chin	"Good Day", Ice Cube
8	"Still I Rise", Angelou	"Cell Therapy", Goodie Mob

* Other poems used for this unit were " Let America Be America Again" by Langston Hughes and "Elegy Written In a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray.

In addition to the group presentations, students were asked to complete an anthology of ten poems that contained an elegy, a ballad, a sonnet, and a poem that described a place with which they were familiar. The title of the poem was to be the place that was featured. Also, the students were asked to write a poem that conveyed a mood, a poem that dealt with a political, social, or economic problem that was important to them (i.e. racism, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, police brutality, poverty, homelessness, etc.), a love poem, a poem that celebrated a particular facet of life (first date, summertime, graduation, etc.), and two open poems that dealt with whatever subject students wanted and written in any style they desired. Following the group presentations, we held a Poetry Reading where each student selected five of his/her original poems to read for the class giving brief comments on each poem such as the context or a special meaning. For the outside of class assignment, students were allowed to pick any song of their choice and write a 5-7 page critical essay of that song. They were also required to submit a transcription of that song.

A Unit Analysis:

As a conclusion to this paper, we want to engage in a preliminary analysis of the effectiveness of the unit as an intervention given its theoretical underpinnings. Data that were collected throughout the unit include observations, field notes, videotapes of student preparation and presentations, interviews, and copies of all written work. In this section we lay out a few observations that are consistent with a preliminary analysis of the data. Where appropriate, we have included transcripts of student conversations, presentations, and interviews.

The unit held consistent with the original goals of being culturally and socially relevant, critically exposing students to the literary canon, and facilitating the development of college-level expository writing. The positioning of hip-hop as a genre of poetry written largely in response to postindustrialism was a concept with which the students were able to relate. The issues of joblessness, poverty, rage, and alienation all had resonance to the urban youth culture of which the students are a part. It also helped to facilitate the transition to understanding the role individual poets may have played in their own societies. As one student responded in an interview:

> Orlando: I think it helped me, because like I appreciated hip-hop like already. And, so now, I can appreciate poetry as well...y'all did a great job relating both of them...

The students were able to generate some excellent interpretations as well as make interesting linkages between the canonical poems and the rap texts. For instance, group 2 talked about how both Grand Master Flash and T.S. Eliot looked out into their rapidly deteriorating societies and saw a

"wasteland". Both poets were essentially apocalyptic in nature as they witnessed death, disease, and decay. Also, both poems talk about a message, indicating the role of a poet in society as a messenger or prophet. Group six discussed the role allegory plays in their two poems where both John Donne and the Refugee Camp use a relationship with a lover to symbolize the love and agony the poet feels for their society.

The unit was consistent with the basic tenets of critical pedagogy in that it was situated in the experiences of the students, called for critical dialogue, a critical engagement of the text, and related the texts to larger social and political issues. Some valid criticisms were that students should have a greater role in selecting the hip-hop texts that are included in the unit. Another student commented that:

> Walter: The group presentations, putting the poem and the song together is a pretty good idea. I think that made us get pretty deep into the songs. Also, I think it would be kinda cool if the students would recommend songs. For analyzing, like [he points to the board] you know, in that format. Because, I think that there are a lot of artists out there, smaller time artists that really aren't recognized. They really have a lot to say as opposed to like Foxy Brown. I don't know, you could get a lot deeper than some of the mainstream stuff.

This student was not only excited about the juxtaposition of the rap and canonical texts, but saw the potential of critically engaging the content of the hip-hop songs. His judgement of the value of hip-hop texts was not determined by record sales or popularity (what he critiques as mainstream), but by the depth of the lyrics and the message. Learning to critically analyze

popular media as Walter has done is an empowering skill that will serve him well as a citizen in a democratic society as well as in the postsecondary academy where such talents are highly valued.

Finally, the students were not only engaged and able to use this expertise and positionality as subjects of the postindustrial world to make powerful connections to canonical texts, they were also able to have fun with learning about a genre of music and literature that they were familiar with. As the unit was culminating and the students are working independently on assembling their poetry unit portfolios, the classroom is a buzz following the energy of the final poetry readings. Students were working to meet the deadline critiquing each other's work and assembling their packages. We pulled, Jermaine, one of the students, to the back of the classroom for some final comments:

> Jermaine: I guess for me, what I got out of the poetry unit as a whole was this was probably the best thing that I've done in my whole years of school. That's what I do. I rap, I emcee or whatever. It's hard right now. I think it's hard right now sometimes for rap to get the respect that it deserves. Like, in a lot of cases, people don't always look at rap as...serious music. My thing is that I want to take rap to the level where it can be accepted by all people on all types of levels in different countries, because it is in different countries right now. No one thinks of it as Shakespeare or whatever. Shakespeare is a great writer, but no one thinks of it as Shakespeare or whatever. How come in every classroom, it can't be required? How come, on the AP tests, there's not rap songs that you have to look at and analyze as serious work, as actual serious work that somebody put their feelings into? Just as there are weak emcees, there are weak writers and people don't buy those books just as people don't buy those tapes or whatever. It's

the same thing with rap or whatever. You get the better writers, and the better writers sometimes sell more, you have your best sellers or whatever, you know what I'm saying. You might have your Grisham, or you might have your KRS One. You might have your...uh...who else writes excellent books...uh...you might have your Amy Tan, and you might have your Bahamadiah or whatever. So, it's like the same or whatever. So, I just want to say that this was a good, no a great unit. Every teacher should approach this unit in the same fashion that you guys did to open up and expand your mind or whatever. A lot of people don't understand certain aspects of rap, but they don't want to ask that next question. They might not listen to rap or whatever. Or they just might think that rap is garbage. It's not garbage. It's like actual music from like actual people.

Jermaine's comments powerfully reflect many of the goals and aspirations that we had in the design and implementation of this classroom unit. In the future, we plan to reengage and analyze the written data, conversations, and presentations for evidence of critical literacy events as well as proficiency according to the state frameworks and what is considered outstanding scholarship in postsecondary institutions. The goal is to show that the students engaged in both critical, intellectual work, and work that has currency in the academy and will help them navigate the gate-keeping mechanisms that preclude them access to higher education and economic empowerment.

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