Fall 12-21-2018

"Soul In A Can": Exploring How Black Male Students And Artists Navigate The Constraints Of Urban Classrooms And The Music Industry

Garfield R. Bright Jr
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/eps_diss

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, "SOUL IN A CAN": EXPLORING HOW BLACK MALE STUDENTS AND ARTISTS NAVIGATE THE CONTRAINTS OF URBAN CLASSROOMS AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY, by GARFIELD BRIGHT was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

_____
Kristen Buras, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

_____   _____
Joyce King, Ph.D.   Santa Davis, Ph.D.
Committee Member   Committee Member

_____
Jennifer Esposito, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Date

_____
William L. Curlette, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of Educational Policy Studies

_____
Paul Alberto, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education and
Human Development

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

By presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the advanced degree from Georgia State University, I agree that the library of Georgia State University shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to quote, to copy from, or to publish this dissertation may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written, by the College of Education and Human Development's Director of Graduate Studies, or by me. Such quoting, copying, or publishing must be solely for scholarly purposes and will not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying from or publication of this dissertation which involves potential financial gain will not be allowed without my written permission.

_____

Garfield Roosevelt Bright
Social Foundations of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Kristen Buras
Department of Social Foundations of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303

CURRICULUM VITAE

Garfield Bright

ADDRESS: 2515 Northeast Expressway #W9
Atlanta, Georgia 30345

EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2018	Georgia State University Educational Policy Studies
MA	2012	Georgia State University African American Studies
BA	2008	California State University at Northridge Political Science

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2015   Co-Facilitator--Professional Development
DeKalb Alternative School
Atlanta, Georgia

2013   Classroom Teacher, Sociology
Black Star Educational Institute
Atlanta, Georgia

2011   Instructor, GSU 1010**:** African American History
and Culture
Georgia State University

2010-2011   Writing Consultant**,** Writing Across the Curriculum
Georgia State University

2008-2010   Classroom Teacher, Social Studies
Environmental Charter High School,
Lawndale, California

2008   Co-Teacher, The Politics of Hip Hop.
California State University at Northridge

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

Muhammad, G. E. & **Bright, G**. (2015, December). *"We Wish to Plead our Own Cause": A Historical Perspective to Writing Instruction to Support the Voices of African American Youth in Classrooms.* Paper session to be presented at the Annual Convention of the Literacy Research Association (LRA), Carlsbad, California.

Bright, G., Avery, T., Myers K., & Davis, S. **(**2015, May**).** *Books Not Bars.* Invited presenter on research to performance, Youth Participatory Action Research Showcase. Presentation at the Annual Convention of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Chicago, Illinois.

Bright, G., Avery, T., Myers K., & Davis, S. (2014, October). *Books Not Bars.* Invited presenter on research to performance, Youth Participatory Action Research Showcase. Presentation at the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Chicago, Illinois.

Bright, G. & Davis, S. (2014, May). *Black Educational Congress' 25th Year Action Plan.* Panel session at the Georgia State University Sources of Educational Excellence Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Williams, B., Salter, D., & **Bright, G.** (2013, May). *Beyond the Bricks: Challenges and successes*. Panel session at the Annual American Educational Research Association (AERA), San Francisco, California.

Lewis, B. & **Bright, G**. (2013, May). *Briggs -Vs- Eliot: Confinement, Movement and Freedom*. Panel session at the Georgia State University Sources of Educational Excellence Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Gibson, E. & **Bright, G.** (2012, November). *Hip Hop pedagogy as a means for literary engagement.* Paper/workshop session at the National Council of Black Studies Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Bright, G. & Bradley, C. (2012, May). *Word is Bond: Multimedia Literacy Project.* Panel session at the Georgia State University Sources of Educational Excellence Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Bright, G. (2011, March). *Toward a More Perfect Union: Pedagogical Tools for Teaching Politics in the Age of Hip Hop.* Panel session at the National Council of Black Studies Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Bright, G. (2007, March). *Cashtration of the Hip Hop Nation.* Panel session at the National Council of Black Studies Conference, Houston, Texas.

Bright, G. (2006, May). *The Black Political Shift: From Electoral and Organizational Politics to Hip Hop.* Panel Session at the National Council of Black Studies Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Bright, G. (in progress). The independent black school movement. In K. Stanford, J. Young and A. Umoja (Eds.), *Black Power Encyclopedia: From the Black Panthers to Stokely Carmichael*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Muhammad, G. E**.** & **Bright, G.** (in press). Toward history for instructional excellence: A review of literacy practices among early African Americans of the 19th century. In D. Hucks, Y. Sealey-Ruiz, S. C. Carothers, V. Showunmi & C. Lewis (Eds.), *Purposeful Teaching and Learning in Diverse Contexts: Implications for Access, Equity and Achievement.*

Stanford, K. & **Bright, G.** (2017). Toward a more perfect union: Pedagogical tools for teaching politics in the age of hip hop. In K. Stanford and C. Jones, (Eds.), ***Dropping Knowledge: Hip Hop Pedagogy in the Academy***, Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press.

Stanford, K. & **Bright, G.** (2011). Toward a more perfect union: Pedagogical tools for teaching politics in the age of hip hop, *International Journal of Africana Studies*, 16(1), 102-116

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS
    2013   American Educational Research Association (AERA)

"Soul in a Can":
Exploring How Black Male Students and Artists
Navigate the Constraints of Urban Classrooms and the Music Industry

By

Garfield Bright

Under the Direction of Dr. Kristen Buras

ABSTRACT

"Soul in a Can" builds on research that explores Black male identity and containment within structures where racial power is distributed inequitably. This research responds to a need for more diversity regarding the range of Black male voices explored in academic literature. This arts-based qualitative research used a case study design to explore how Black male students and artists navigate the constraints of urban classrooms and the music industry. The following questions guided this exploration: How do contemporary professional Black male recording artists navigate the recording industry's tendency to restrain their personal "voice" and creative agency in the process of commodifying their talents? How do Black male youth navigate classroom spaces to maintain their personal "voice" and creative agency? Are there similarities between the experiences of Black male artists and Black males in the education system and how they navigate the power differential they face? Data is comprised of participant interviews with six Black males including three students and three professional recording artists. Interviews were conducted in a two-phase process that respectively focused on participant rendered *key metaphors* and *sound worlds.* More specifically, the researcher employed a Critical Race Theory frame emphasizing two

of its components— "whiteness as property" and "interest convergence"—along with an Arts-Based Methodology which employed a fugue of elements in order to creatively collect and analyze data. Significantly the study chronicles and offers insight into the Black experience and resistance in two sites—the music industry and classrooms—as lived by Black male artists and students. Notably, these two sites have not been adequately examined in relation to one another. Findings reveal that participants across sites navigated inequitable power through a four-phase process— "I'll figure it out," "Peep Game," "New Attitude," and "Experience is the best teacher"—in which experiential knowledge was refined and sharpened; this enabled participants to successfully survive endemic racism, but questions remain regarding what the author terms *dysconscious acquiescence* or the apparent belief that "surviving" is a substitute for "thriving." Implications abound regarding the impact of structural containment on Black identity development, cultural authenticity, and expression.

"Soul in a Can":
Exploring How Black Male Students and Artists
Navigate the Constraints of Urban Classrooms and the Music Industry

by

Garfield Bright

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Social Foundations of Educational Policy Studies

in

Educational Policy Studies

in

the College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There have been many who have sacrificed much to lend support to my successful completion of this undertaking. There have also been a few key spaces that played a prominent role in my identity development. The following is a list of those souls and places that have been invaluable to the overall quality of my journey and development as a scholar, as well as my development as a human in progress. Thank you:

Grandma Rosa Harris and Grandma Elizabeth Parks, Valvier Bright (My guardian angel and mother), Garfield Bright, Sr. and Annie Bright, Marilyn Wade, Barbara Williams, Carolyn Hines, Jeannie Burke, Brenda Khan, Dr. Reed and the Reed Family, Doc Stone, Peter Cotton and the Cottons, "Squirrel" Thomas, Coach Enis Salter, Coach Ronald Dukes, Capital City Boys Club (Montgomery) Don Harris, Lowe and Melvin Wade, Ritchie Thomas, Robert Williams, Demetria James, Dr. Kristen Buras, Dr. Joyce King, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, Dr. Jennifer Esposito, Dr. Sarita Davis, Dr. Johnathan Gayles, Dr. Charles Jones, Dr. Akinyele Umoja and Aminata Umoja, Dr. Mukungu Akinyela, Dr. Cora Presley, Dr. Dunham, Dr. Karin Stanford, Ebony, Kayla, Kenyatta, Valerie, Trevor, Tairiq, Garfield III, Mizan, Nasir, Tina, Lonzia, Cecil, Alonzo A. Crim Center, Shai, Darnell Vanrensalier, George Spencer, Dwayne Jones, Earl Christian III., Alan Carlton, Deshawn, Omari (Faise), Jerquan (Bam), Tracey Lee, Deric Angelettie, Akil the MC, Jhazzmyn Joiner, Blak, C-Sharp, Chuck Barlow, Jr. and Sr., UETT (Original cohort), Jason (Beyond the Bricks), Ebrik Coffee, Black Nia Force, NOI, Howard University, Early College (GSU), Zelia Stevens Early Childhood Center (ASU), St. John's Middle School, Cloverdale Jr. High School, Quincy High School, Brockton High School, Volunteers of America (Knoxville), Capital City Boys Club, Cleveland Avenue YMCA, Racoule Village, Alabama State University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 6: COMMONALITIES AND CONCLUSION

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1: Introduction

Prologue: My Story, My Research

By the time I reached high school in Quincy, Massachusetts, I had already been to six different schools in three different cities in the south (Montgomery, Mobile and Atlanta). Although my high school matriculation began in Quincy, Massachusetts, I moved once again in my sophomore year to Brockton, Massachusetts, where my pre-college journey ultimately culminated. I traversed an educational terrain that would take me from the deep south, not far removed temporally (1970s) from the fervor and milieu of the civil rights movement, including an overt racist climate that was still very entrenched and palpable, to a North that was on the cusp of post-industrial decline and the ushering in of what has become the digital/technology age. My coming-of-age years were in direct alignment with the coming of age of Hip Hop as the viable socio-cultural force it has become.

As Hip Hop became more solidified in its identity, I, as an impressionable teenager in the early 1980s, strongly related to Hip Hop as not only a Black and Latino phenomenon but as a youth phenomenon. I was empowered by the creativity and audacity of Hip Hop in its early days. It was political, strong in its views, but it could also be at once entertaining and authentic. I embodied these traits as an intellectual rapper (in the tradition of KRS, Chuck D, and Rakim) and as a break-dancer (B-Boy) during Hip Hop's early days and as I have grown into adulthood those same traits that I admired about Hip Hop in its early days, have strongly impacted and still comprise a large part of my identity. I was deeply impacted and influenced by Hip Hop culture, which played a key role in my adjustment capacity as a bright young man who moved away from mom as a single parent in Montgomery, to a dad and stepmother in Quincy.

It was 1983 and I was heading to a new city, to attend a new high school, and to be one of only two Blacks in an urban school of 2000 students. Hip Hop's burgeoning mass appeal created a buffer relative to peer/race relations, as B-Boying (breakdancing) had caught on in white neighborhoods where a subculture of whites identifying with Hip Hop and Black youth, began to emerge. In spite of a few altercations that were racially charged, I still managed to build comradery and rapport through a common interest in the emerging hip hop culture, with many in the predominantly white student body, making my overall experience one that I perceived to be good.

However, the way I was related to in the classroom by teachers and administrators as authority figures felt harsh and abrasive, especially in terms of how I was engaged in discourse or hyper monitored by them, as a rule. I was constantly confused by what seemed to be a projection of disdain for my presence, when in my mind I hadn't done anything to them to warrant such a disposition. I had experienced that uneasy, tense, gut feeling of cultural dissonance in the south but it was usually accompanied by the word "nigger." Here in Massachusetts, the feeling was just as strong if not stronger than the south, but it wasn't overtly expressed through slurs; it was demonstrated more in micro aggressions or through exclusion. I remember not wanting to even go to school anymore, feeling like the teachers genuinely did not like me. I was taught by my parents to be very respectful of authority figures, was genuinely interested in doing well in school and typically considered to be a good kid as well as a good student.

One pivotal moment in my matriculation occurred in my ninth-grade year while in algebra class. My teacher singled me out, the only Black student in the class, to take out the trash. The manner in which she expressed the need for the trash to be taken out was done in an

interrogative form. Coming from the south, I was used to adults telling you what they wanted you to do if it was something that they seriously wanted done. This particular teacher said in a very thick New England accent, "Gah-field, you wanna take out the gahbage?" I actually thought that she was giving me the option to say yes or no to the question she had just posed. I thought about it for a second and remember thinking, "Well I don't particularly mind, but I'm not trying to stick out more than I already do being the only Black in class, and somebody else may really want to take it out more than I do," and as a result, I declined the "offer," by answering in the negative. The teacher decoded my behavior as deviant and disrespectful and treated me accordingly throughout the semester, even though those weren't my intentions and I had never shown any behavioral problems as a student in her class. She made a set of assumptions that branded me in her eyes as something that I wasn't—uneducable. She withdrew support and made herself scarce when I asked for clarity or help on a given skill. I eventually checked out and lost self-esteem as a math student going forward, as a result of the experience.

As I've recalled and played this incident over in my head in my adult years, I have come to realize that she misunderstood me. I now recognize that New England speech culture takes commands and presents them as questions. An outsider like myself at the time, may easily get caught up in the literal interrogative form and attempt to answer the question instead of performing in accord with what was actually a command or strong request. I regret never having the opportunity to let her know that this young Black man wasn't the stereotype made real before her very eyes, but a shy ninth grader, who chose to pass an opportunity *to get out of the classroom* to someone who may enjoy it more than himself. I wonder how she would respond to the knowledge that her former Black student who fell through the cracks on her watch, persevered and is now a doctoral candidate as well as a platinum selling, NAACP Image Award

winning recording artist. How many of our future problem solvers, through the arts, become felons due to consistent misperception of actions as sole indicators of character rather than considering intent and the potential for the existence of a justifiable rationale for the action?

I knew early that my personal and academic growth would literally be "contained" by the strong anti-Black male sentiment that characterized Quincy, Massachusetts in 1984, and I navigated that portion of my becoming, by shifting venues. Having convinced my father to move to Brockton, Massachusetts, a blue collar, gritty, urban terrain with a diversified mixture of ethnicities, including a large Black community, I felt a stronger sense of belonging with the social scene and amongst my fellow students. Still, in many instances the Black and Latino students, myself included, that identified with Hip Hop (dress, slang, hairstyles, etc.), especially males, were the ones consistently met with an oppositional and often dismissive tone by the administrators and teachers, as a standard operational procedure.

We would push back by appealing to their morality, asking clarifying questions aimed at their morality: "What makes you so angry with us from just looking at us? Is there any particular thing we can apologize for that would make us get along better?" Such a tactic allowed us to respectfully challenge the authority that seemed adversarial to us based on appearances. We noticed that any pushback against the feeling of being negatively stigmatized because of shallow markers like clothing or skin color justified and invited more degradation and further mythologizing of the concept known as the *Black male urban student*.

Although I was in all honors classes, carried a briefcase and wore blazers as a style of choice, I was still exposed to the general marginalization that, regardless of location, I experienced as a student of color. Despite making the Dean's list and excelling academically in my honors classes, I never received a recommendation to advanced placement classes or was

made aware of dual enrollment options, as I later learned other children had done at the advice of their guidance counselor. I often wonder how many other Black males like me were faced with having to navigate school as a site of marginalization rather than support and what that felt like to them as well as how that informed their decisions around behavior. What would be their perceptions of how it impacted what they had become as adults?

As an adult who has put considerable time into honing my academic sensibilities and pursuits I am still at my core, a highly creative person. While at Howard, I became politically active. As a Political Science major, I ran and won the election for Liberal Arts Vice President and lost a close election in my junior year as a candidate for the presidency of the Howard University Student Association. Howard was also a place where I was exposed to many talented peers who were not only musicians but were also politically and socially conscious beings. These were people, like myself, who saw "both and" as normal instead of the "either, or" mode of thinking to which many people subscribe. While still in attendance at Howard University pursuing my bachelors in Liberal Arts, myself and three other associates who comprise the R and B group Shai, threw caution to the wind and signed a recording contract with Gasoline Alley/MCA Records in 1992, distinguishing me as a professional recording artist who has been able to sell millions of records, and along with my group mates, even win an NAACP image award for being "Outstanding New Artists," in 1993.

Internally however, from the studio sessions to the business meetings that dealt with various issues including publishing splits, album budget advances, tour support, artwork, imaging, political moves and more, as signed artists to a label with unlimited resources, every step of the way was an exercise in negotiation for access to viability as a human and to being perceived as a co-equal partner in what amounts to the delivery of a culture based product to be

sold commercially. Without negotiation, the power dynamic that favored white control over the process would ultimately render artists with as little control or residual benefits as possible for their artistic contributions to the label's economic bottom line. I often felt challenged in my own Blackness by a machine that constantly sought to superimpose their version of what I should be in the marketplace over my will to be myself as I saw myself.

My experiences as an artist signed to a label included several pivotal clashes with the label, primarily over creative control. As artists, we felt that we knew the music we created for our market better than the labels did because we not only looked like a considerable portion of our market as African American artists, but we were in the marketplace supporting the product, interacting with the consumers before it became available for purchase. We always received pushback regarding the singles that we thought should be released or at what point "remixes" should be placed into the market. The major labels would often lag behind the trends and wait too long to get behind efforts that were on the pulse of what fans wanted to hear. As artists who were connected to our fans, the inability to be heard regarding how to present projects to the market that we wrote and produced was stifling and devaluing to say the least.

Issues of representation also encroached on our ability to completely name ourselves. Our name "Shai" is ancient Egyptian in origin and means *the personification of destiny*, in the masculine sense. We appealed to the label to utilize the hieroglyphic spelling of our name along with the English alphabetical spelling towards the attempt to create brand recognition in a manner that preserves the cultural authenticity of the concept. It seemed counterintuitive to me that our very name and how it was presented would even be up for discussion, let alone basically out of our hands. Out of respect and a sense of responsibility to the Ancient Egyptian cultural traditions that gave birth to the name/concept Shai, we wanted to play up on the imagery of our

ancestors from Ancient Egypt (KMT). We proposed an album cover that would feature the members of Shai as lost pharaohs that had been discovered in a dark underground cave-like area, illuminated by a torch to show our human faces in pharaonic headgear, carved out of stone with pieces of our actual flesh showing through the stone busts in places where parts of the stone had fallen off to reveal our flesh tones.

The title of the Album was slated to be "Destiny." The label allowed their art department to go as far as rendering it to our specifications, only to halt the production of that particular album cover project and replace it with a less majestic image of their making, that amounted to a collage of our four images together on the cover. As we pushed back and became more adamant about the artwork and song selection, the label actually responded by putting the album on the market, shipping hundreds of thousands to distributors and record stores before the market was actually serviced with a single release on the radio, to generate demand for the albums that would then be ordered and placed in stores in response to what would be at that point, the calculated/projected consumer demand. Most of the albums were returned to MCA because they weren't selling—no one knew the album was even out.

Our ultimate remedy in the face of that iteration of white control over Black product was to align with a smaller, preferably Black owned, but more acquiescent label in terms of creative control. We proceeded in that direction, signing with a small independent label in 1997. We gained creative control but lost major distribution capacity. I often ask myself if it was worth it to lose major backing in order to gain more creative control over the artistic content and my humanity as an artist, a thinker and a human. How would other Black male artists or even my own sons facing similar situations, navigate their label or their everyday experience in a hyper

policed school, regarding the need to preserve their humanity and/or the integrity of their art form?

As I reflect on the plight of my sons, two of which are burgeoning producers in the music industry, I am constantly uneasy about how the amoral, bottom line sensibilities of the entertainment industry and the neo-liberal market place capture of the educational system in America will impact their creative spirit. I have always imparted to them an awareness that their biggest resource and talent is their ability to imagine and creatively articulate/render their version of reality. In a white male corporate context, where creativity/culture is only valid if it fits a quantifiable metric designed by the corporate imaginary, I wonder if such a contrast will affect their passion to create and nurture that aspect of their perceived purpose? Will it rob them of their perception that music, as an extension of their own culture, is sacred? And finally, will it stifle their ability to develop a healthy identity as adults who embrace their affinity for music as a source of therapy and soul fulfillment instead of conforming to the corporate perception of music as being strictly a *for profit* commodity?

This study is reflective of my understanding as an insider in both structures, the music industry and the classroom, and my desire to know more about others like me (Black, male, musically/artistically inclined) who have traversed these same structures of white control over black education and entertainment, and how they navigated their positions in the face of structures that sought to marginalize their humanity and only emphasize their capacity as human capital. As a Black male entertainer and artist who has felt the pressures of both contexts and has had to make some life defining decisions around my real-time perceptions of these environments, I want to feel as well as get a cognitive sense of how, structures that are historically known to be insensitive and amoral concerning black males, are interpreted and responded to by Black males.

How do artists retain agency to be themselves in the face of a machine that only values their ability to turn a profit as a human product—a soul in a can?

Statement of Research Problem

The criminalization of the Black male as a dominant discourse in America and abroad is well documented in the academic literature (Aull, 2012; Dancy, 2014; Davis, 1996; Ferguson, 2001; Giroux, 2003; Heitzeg, 2009). Black males have been marginalized historically and are currently being marginalized and commodified in and by white structures of power (i.e. schools and entertainment industry) (Bogle, 1993; Dancy, 2014; Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Although the fact that Black males are marginalized and often contained while navigating these inequitable spaces of power is well documented, how they understand the marginalization and how that may influence navigation within the power structure, is underrepresented in the literature. Not only is there a dearth of research that explores Black males' ways of perceiving the white male power structures that they navigate, even more scarce in the academic literature are narratives that foreground the Black male voice speaking about his lived experiences of white male-controlled spaces.

Research Questions and Significance

This project is significant, primarily because it responds to a need for more diversity with regard to the range of Black male voices that are able to be accessed and fully explored in academic literature. It is also significant in that it chronicles and offers insight into the Black imagination and resistance in two sites—the music industry and classrooms—as lived by Black male artists and students. Such proximity to Black male thought as it navigates White male power structures, humanizes Black males in a manner that counters the single-story characterizations and negative depictions in mass media and in popular societal discourse that

often shape teacher and administrator perceptions of Black male students. By capturing personal narratives, "Soul In A Can" not only preserves the integrity of the cultural production processes of the participating Black artists and students, relative to the power structures they maneuver, but also privileges their perspectives/meaning making regarding their positionality within such structures.

This dissertation research focuses on the following research questions:

(RQ1) How do contemporary professional Black male recording artists navigate the recording industry's tendency to restrain their personal "voice" and creative agency in the process of commodifying their talents?

(RQ2) How do Black male youth navigate classroom spaces to maintain their personal "voice" and creative agency?

(RQ3) Are there similarities between the experiences of Black male artists in the music industry and Black males in the education system in the United States and how they navigate the power differential they face to retain their personal voice in the music making process and in classrooms?

Assumptions

This research assumes that Black males in white structures, where they face and navigate a Black/White power differential, perceive it as such and respond to it in a manner that reflects a conscious awareness that there may be competing interests at play, relative to control over some if not all aspects of black textual production, from culturally specific behavior in the classroom (i.e. Hip-Hop dress, lingo, etc.) to cultural forms of art and entertainment in the music industry. It also assumes that each participant is a source of authority based on their lived experiences either in the classroom or in the music industry and their narrative depictions of their experiences as

captured by the interviews in the data collection process are valid and valuable cultural and historical artifacts. It assumes that from these explorations into Black male's navigation of white power spaces, can be drawn inferences that support a more equitable, nurturing and humane pedagogical approach to educating students in urban environments.

Overview of Theories and Methods

Data Collection

This arts-based qualitative research study (Eaves, 2014; Leavy, 2009; Daykin, 2004; Bagley& Cancienne, 2002) employed a case study (Stake, 1995) approach in order to treat each student's and artist's perspective as an individual case, exploring and comparing their perceptions of power, per their given contexts. This study relied on 4 audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with each participant (students and artists) that were 45-60 minutes in duration. There were two tiers to the interview process. After the initial round of interviews with the students and the artists, each group was shown excerpts/quotes and photos that were relevant to the content of the initial interviews in order to elicit reflections around similarities and differences between the two group's experiences. The resulting feedback interviews, along with the original interviews, provided an element of connectivity between the two groups and facilitated a more comprehensive pool of data from which a richer analysis was developed. Brief follow up interviews were conducted when necessary for the sake of clarity and comprehensiveness.

Sampling and Criteria

This project employed purposeful sampling in order to achieve a sample size of six participants. Out of the six participants, there were three professional Black, male, Hip Hop recording artists and three Black male students who aspire to be artists. This sample size reflects

a consideration on the part of the researcher, who aspired to conduct in depth interviews via an arts-based approach, and to engage in comparative analysis of two seemingly distinct data sets.

Criteria for participant selection regarding this project included a willingness to speak freely in an interview setting and commitment to be available for a follow up interview. The three Black male artists who served as participants should have been signed directly to or distributed by a major label at some point in their career. This was vital in terms of being able to draw from actual experiences that featured interaction with the concrete, formal structures (major labels) directly representing the larger white, corporate interests that control the recording industry. I focused on Black males because I am a Black male who has done extensive community work with this population. More, this sub population has historically been marginalized in a particular manner in the face of white power structures and this research sought to further elucidate the distinct ways that Black males have navigated the particular type of containment and fear discourse within white power structures.

There is also a particular narrative associated with the Black male that is distinct within the African American experience. This research troubles that narrative which especially stories Black males as super predators and naturally deviant criminals and thugs by facilitating the creation of counter narratives through the interview process. These artists collectively represented a span of time that covers the last twenty years. The music industry is dynamic and trendy. Twenty years is a large enough window to capture clear patterns longitudinally that speak to trends that may have become more or less impactful in the navigation attempts of Black male artists within major label structures. There are no other considerations such as educational background, other than that they should have at least some experience as a high school student at some point in their lives. This stipulation was important because they were asked to respond to

experiences of the students in the study and their feedback to the students' responses should have been informed at least in part by their own past experiences as high school students.

The three Black, male students who participated in this research study ranged in age from 19-21. These participants were high school graduates and no more than two years removed from their high school experiences, in order to ensure that their accounts were reliable and not compromised or degraded by excessive temporal distance from the events discussed in the interviews. Each participant also self-identified as an aspiring artist in the music industry. This sensibility and self-definition as one who aspires to be a professional artist facilitated a deeper congruence to the artists, outside of just being a black male and a former student. It also emphasized the relative similarities between the two structures that both groups of artistically inclined/creative Black bodies were attempting to navigate.

Theoretical Framework

This research utilized Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas, 1995) to analyze data. Particular focus was placed on whiteness as property and interest convergence. These domains are the most relevant aspects of CRT for this study. *Interest convergence* speaks to the social phenomenon where the interests of African Americans and other people of color, concerning the achievement of racial equality, will be accommodated only when that converges with the interests of Whites who are in policy making positions (Bell, 1980).

As the Black males in this study expressed their narratives around how they navigated White power, points of "successful" or "unsuccessful" navigation were analyzed in terms of the degree to which interest convergence was indeed a factor or not, along with the attendant costs of compromise. *Whiteness as property,* according to Harris (1993), is a phenomenon that stems

from the system of slavery, where white identity and property became conflated such that whiteness and white identity were sources of privilege and protection. Whiteness became the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings. In this study, attention was given to the ways that whiteness functions as property in urban schools and the corporate music industry. Specific attention was given to the ways whiteness constrained the expression of Black students and artists, confining them to particular modes of Black cultural expression for white benefit or profit.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The notion that Black male students and professional recording artists are located within structures that privilege white maleness holds precedence within the literature. The participants of this study are Black and male. They are students and artists. They gave voice to narratives that spoke to their experiences as Black males navigating and making decisions according to how they understood their positionality in a structure verses their aspirations to tangibly succeed at expressing their humanity according to their own will. The narratives are contemporary in terms of coming out of contexts that exist today, however, the individual narratives of Black male sentiments and processes featured in this study reflect a longer tradition of Black males functioning within contexts characterized by white control of Black entertainment and education.

An assortment of disciplines is reflected in this literature review, including African American Studies, educational history, and Cultural Studies. The areas of importance include the history of education as it relates to Blacks and equity, the history of white control over Black cultural production in the entertainment based industries, particularly the Black male image and sound, and neoliberal urbanism, its impact on educational policy, and the containment of Black bodies. The literature review is presented in two sections. The first section facilitates an historic link to the contemporary positionality of the Black male participants by highlighting literature that speaks to sustained ownership by whites of Black education and Black cultural production. The second section explores literature that emphasizes the contemporary educational and entertainment landscape and culture, in which the participants of this study are situated and must navigate, as a current more evolved extension of the historical discourse of containment, control and capitalization of Black male bodies.

History of White Control of Black Education and Black Music/Culture

Control of Black Education

For over 400 years, the institution of slavery created a dynamic that placed white men in a position of unchecked control over Black bodies, literally regarding them as chattel property. The ability of an enslaved person to be literate or to express any talent they had was either controlled, exploited or both by the slave master by virtue of him being the owner. Thus, extending from the slavery period of American history, the young Black men in this study are part of a long legacy of Black males who navigated inequitable white power structures (i.e. the educational system and the music industry), owned and controlled by white men. Urban and Wagoner (2009) provide a comprehensive account of the history of education in America.

Although much terrain is covered in their historical rendering, Urban and Wagoner (2009) often foreground the role of race as it impacted the life experiences of blacks, highlighting the role of fear of the black male as a driving factor in the need for whites to control the access to and nature of Black education. They begin their account in pre-colonial America but the authors locate the African American point of entry into formal schooling contexts in the 1790s, with the Sunday school movement, which was essentially a shared sensibility by white churches in the north and south, that emphasized providing literary and moral instruction to poor and working class Black children. Access for Blacks to institutions such as these (much like contemporary society) was limited by the degree to which the utility of the product of the educated Black male outweighed the fear of his potential ability to pose a threat to white male control as a result of his education. Urban and Wagoner (2009) make mention of several key moments that highlight the manner in which white male power structures seek to control, by exclusion or cooptation, Black access to equitable education and expose the contempt by white

males of Black male non- acceptance of/non-conformity to white supremacy/control. The authors address the Sunday school movement's impetus to provide a moral education that involved literacy as a means to shape a habitus within slaves to default to white culture as superior and desirable in place of their own. Success for the whites in control would be a more civilized and respectable slave who could be trusted to utilize their skills to please and benefit the whites who owned them.

This socio/economic project which started in the 1790s abruptly came to a halt on the heels of an act of defiance of white power by a Black enslaved male. The Nat Turner rebellion of 1831 resulted in the nearly complete shutting down of the Sunday schools, with the exception of very few, as the Black Codes were established in the south as a response to Turner's rebellion. A consistent theme connoted throughout Urban and Wagoner's (2009) analysis is that the extent to which Blacks can be controlled and commoditized determines the extent to which they will be allowed access to resources that support a quality education. Urban and Wagoner very candidly speak to the efforts of white power to control Black education through containment/cooptation.

Further exemplifying the historical, systemic exclusion and marginalization of Blacks in the white owned system of education, particularly in the southern United States, where the participants of this study attend school and live, Urban and Wagoner (2009) point out the mandated divestment in Black schools as a major element in the shaping of southern educational policy. Illustrative of such a mandated policy based on disdain for Black presence as an equal in traditionally white educational contexts is the Peabody Fund in 1869, which was distributed as pushback against integrated schools. Under the direction of Barnas Sears the Fund expressly prohibited funding integrated schools and limited funding for Black schools to one-third that of Whites with the rationale being that mixed schools are a curse since whites would not likely

attend with Blacks and that "it cost less to maintain schools for the colored children than the white" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 167; Watkins, 2001).

Urban and Wagoner (2009) point to several other key moments in history that impacted the lives of Black Americans, including *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1970s, that upon further review proved to incite more marginalization and segregation. In regard to *Brown*, the authors observe, moral panic and fear of Black proximity to Whites literally trumped enforcement efforts and pushback took the form of demonstrations from white citizens' councils who voiced vehement opposition to the mandated physical space sharing between Blacks and whites (i.e. Little Rock 9, 1958). These examples of the historical progression of white owned public education in the south provide a broad backdrop with which the patterns of white historical control over Black education can be gleaned.

Merry and New (2008), though primarily focused on the challenges and promises of an African centered pedagogy, shared much in common with Ladson-Billings (2004) by speaking to the *Brown* decision in terms of devastation done to Black teachers, pointing out that the integration mandates contained within *Brown* effectively dismantled Black communities through the closure of Black schools, the firing and displacement of thousands of Black teachers and rezoning practices that politically undermined Black agency through the fragmentation of Black communities. Countless examples of white pushback to mandated equality through integration abound. The Civil Rights Movement, particularly in the 1960s and the 1970s, which spawned the Civil Rights Act as a protective mechanism for Black rights and citizenship, was met with resistance by the establishment. The response was an attack on the culture of the African American community through discourses of pathology and criminalization (i.e. Coleman Report, 1966, Moynihan Report, 1965).

Boateng (1990) speaks to the primacy of the preservation of culture of Black students in educational spaces for the purposes of adequate emotional growth and development. He posits that deculturalization, a system induced non-identification with one's ethnic culture, occurs in white structures that background and discourage the heritage of Black pupils. Opposed to the process of "deculturalization" (Boateng, 1990, p. 73), resulting from the integrationist experiment, Black communities began to demand more from the American educational system. *Brown*, and the promise of better quality education, didn't live up to its promise. Kinfano (1996) whose work focuses on the application of Afrocentric education in supplementary schools, is illustrative of community desire to control the quality of education for Black students. He points to the strand of subversive thought that recognized the inequitable power distribution and sought to navigate that inequality by creating independent structures in which to educate Black children in a non-deculturalizing environment.

Kinfano (1996) also reflects on the 1970s climate of discontent and need for equity that prompted Black scholars and concerned community members to pursue efforts to reverse the trend of white owned Black education. He addresses the underrepresentation of Blackness and the predominance of Eurocentrism in the public-school curriculum as well as in the university system across the country. Kinfano specifically notes how Black leaders appealed to white authority to replace the Eurocentric curriculum with an Afrocentric one that would better serve and reflect Black students. The resulting Black Independent School movement represented a thrust that would pushback institutionally (i.e. Council of Independent Black Institutions-CIBI), vocally and physically. Brown (2007) and Hall (1999), both African American Studies scholars, invite the audience to critically ponder, particularly in predominantly white institutions, the state of the discipline since its nascence in 1965 at Merrit College. They both offer historical

recollections regarding the contentious manner and the conditions under which African American Studies was born in institutions of higher education. Both scholars illustrate the cycle of navigation of power between Blacks who actively attempt to gain equity and the ensuing pushback of the white structures that either contain and coopt or exclude and marginalize as they reassert control. In the spirit of empowerment generated by the Civil Rights Movement, Black scholars and communities of color challenged whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) by demanding the creation of African American Studies at predominately white institutions, including the Ivy League universities. In some instances, (i.e. Cornell, Harvard, San Francisco State) the approach was violent and confrontational, while others (i.e. Yale) were more formal in tone (Brown, 2007; Hall, 1999).

Hall (1999) emphasizes the degree to which moral panic at the universities begged for a response to the perceived threat. In all cases the universities acquiesced to the initial demands but instead of an Afrocentric curriculum, most of the schools simply added some courses in history and/or literature or had courses in existing departments comprise an African American Studies program, but very few became autonomous departments, outside of Harvard, Ohio State, and Cornell (Hall, 1999). The Yale model, which was produced at the Yale conference in 1968 and backed by support from the Ford Foundation, was lauded as the best model for the "program approach" and cited as the most effective instantiation of African American Studies (Hall, 1999).

Thus, the replication of this philanthropically supported model was utilized to coopt, brand and reduce the discipline itself to a contained, deradicalized, uncritical version, that in some cases "consisted of little more than the publication of a brochure listing already extant courses, some of which bore little obvious or direct relevance to Black Studies" (Hall, 1999). Eerily reminiscent of the establishment of Tuskegee, white philanthropic support (ownership),

under the guise of benevolence, solved their moral panic by limiting the potential of Blackness to threaten the white proprietary space it inhabited. Further, this disempowered, coopted brand of Black Studies, considered the best model by philanthropists, was a containment strategy that made "programs" not as attractive to the "militant" Blacks and would reduce their potential presence on white campuses. The original vision of a self-contained unit dedicated to privileging Black epistemological values was ultimately replaced by a less threatening iteration that has not been embraced by the activists in the field who comprised the Black Studies Movement (Hall, 1999).

White elite control/ownership over Black education has been the reality throughout history and has utilized the same tactics to accomplish its goals of containing Black bodies, emphasizing whiteness as valuable and authoritative, and the systematic capitalization of Black labor. This is evidenced even in contemporary times through neoliberal urbanization, where accumulation by dispossession, coercive policies, displacement and containment of Blackness for profit are all strongly considered in the elite overarching schema of white proprietary protection (Buras, 2015). This history of exclusion and marginalization, regarding access to and equity within white power structures, informs the contemporary conditions within which the Black males in this study are situated. The aforementioned processes have not only impacted Black minds and bodies in an educative context, including myself and the other black males participating in this research, but many of these same dynamics have historically occurred with regard to white control of Black cultural expression.

Discursive Trendsetters/Trend Sustainers: Impact on Replication of Systemic Inequity

Over and above structural mechanisms that impact the value of black bodies in the public imagination, throughout history, there have been contributions by several discursive trendsetters that have shaped and sustained an orientation that perceives Black culture (and more specifically Black males) as inherently in need of security/paternal based solutions. The White paternal posture proliferates the discourse about how to manage the Black male. Over time, it has and continues to profoundly influence educational policymakers and classrooms as well as the general perception that Black culture is pathological by nature. For the participants of this study, the structures of power they currently navigate have been influenced by such discourse/policy trendsetting works.

Deficit Discourse

Formally known as "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action" (Moynihan, 1965) the Moynihan Report was based on a study conducted in Harlem by the board of directors of Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Inc. The report began by praising the resilience and fortitude of Blacks whose action had culminated in the passage of the Civil Rights Act. As it progressed, the report took a sharp turn and attacked the black community citing the breakdown of the Black family as the cause of its deterioration and as a drain on America itself. It went further to suggest that this breakdown in the Black family is not only creating a high dependence on the welfare system, but it is producing Black youth who are reflective of their criminal, delinquent, and fatherless environments. It finally blamed the Black male as the crux of the problem, characterizing him as deviant, criminal, childish and in need of a man-making structure to redeem his manhood. As exhibited by the following quote, the Moynihan Report uses research (interview data) to authoritatively paint/brand Black males as anti-social beings

who acknowledge and hate their own inferiority:

> We are plagued, in work with these youth, by what appears to be a low tolerance for
> frustration. They are not able to absorb setbacks. Minor irritants and rebuffs are
> magnified out of all proportion to reality. Perhaps they react as they do because they
> are not equal to the world that confronts them, and they know it. And it is the knowing
> that is devastating (p. 30).

The Coleman Report, produced by a team led by James Coleman et al. (1966) surveyed over 150,000 students nationwide. More formally known as the "Equality of Educational Opportunity" report, it concluded that funding had little effect on student achievement; it was Black proximity to white people (socio-economic status) that had a positive impact on academic outcomes. The report sparked the desegregated busing of Black children from segregated areas to integrated white schools as the solution to the academic achievement gap, producing moral panic which drove whites to flee from those areas. This report further entrenched the deficit notions of Black under achievement, natural inferiority to whites and Black dependence on white structure as being perceived as normal. In combination with similar reports, this report was responsible for communicating the notion that Black presence is pathological and should be contained for the safety of those who are higher in class status.

"A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" (1983) was the first report created by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the purpose of which was to render practical recommendations for educational improvement. Tying personal academic performance to the nation's economic status and wellbeing set the stage for more solutions to problems of inefficiency and productivity. It also invited more ridicule from those in administrative capacities, particularly of minorities who statistically comprised the lower

percentiles of standardized test scores. It facilitated what amounts to hyper accountable schooling and highly standardized curricula as a solution/replacement for what has been characterized as an inferior, low performing model, often euphemistic for a Black urban school. "A Nation at Risk" prompted the onset of the hyper performative, punitive based, neo-liberal educational reforms (i.e. *Race To The Top* and *No Child Left Behind*) that have become increasingly common over time. These have resulted in the closing down and conversion of many urban schools into charter schools across the nation, displacing teachers and students in their wake (Buras, 2008, 2015).

Williams' (1987) *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy* addresses urban poverty and race by highlighting the spatial mismatch theory as the explanation for unemployment in Black communities. Williams' study characterizes Black communities as representing an underclass whose lack of skills and mobility perpetuates their unemployed status. Although Williams points out structural factors contributing to unemployment, such a report further reified the concept of Black cultural pathology as characterizations of a Black underclass extend the same claims as previous policy reports.

"Super-Predator" Discourse

Moriearty and Carson's "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America" (2012), considers fallout from the "Super-predator" war during the 1990s. This phrase was coined by Princeton professor John Di Iulio in 1995, who predicted that a wave of violent, adult-like children who handled their problems with gun violence would be descending on the streets of America, en masse, by the year 2000. As a result, moral panic and fear prompted nearly every state to try kids as adults and expand criminal court sentencing over juvenile offenders. Although race was not exclusively mentioned, it was heavily implied and coupled with media, which

highlighted the high crime rates corresponding to the crack epidemic and confirmed the projections of impending waves of violence, leaving Black male children adultified and criminalized. This particular discourse has been a primary contributor to the disproportionate representation of Black males in most categories that correspond to subpar behavior and performance in school settings. It also shapes the perceptions of teachers, lawmakers, policymakers, school administrators, law enforcement, and potential employers before they step into spaces that contain Black male bodies and strongly impacts the likelihood of inequitable treatment of those Black bodies. Perhaps most tragically, all of this has lead to the mass incarceration of Black men (Alexander, 2010)

Liberative Discourse

Throughout the progression of white control over Black education, Black intellectuals have offered resistance in the form of seminal works that clearly assess the state of Black education through a critique of white supremacy. Their works serve as real time counter narratives and as barometers of how White control of Black education is impacting the Black community. Through the structural application (i.e. schools, pedagogy, curriculum, policies) of what amounts to violence, each male in this research, having been educated in such a system, has been impacted in some form. These academic narratives speak to the ubiquity of white control through the distinct violence perpetuated by the forced whitening of knowledge/education that persisted throughout history, as it does today.

W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk,* originally published in 1903, reflected the mind of a scholar and the pressure felt, relative to being Black in a white owned imaginary, characterizing it as the "peculiar sensation of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others" (Dubois and Edwards, 2007, p. 16-17). He also spoke to the power of the color line, an

allusion to the racial cut off created by Whiteness to clearly demarcate where blackness stops and where access to whiteness as private property begins. Du Bois pointed to the educational arena as the venue in which to observe the color line, as it was the key determinate in the differing levels of equity between Blacks and whites around the turn of the 20th century. This analysis served Black America as it foregrounded race and provided an analysis that could serve as a means of orientation for Blacks, in order to navigate white supremacy as a system, with more clarity of context.

Carter G. Woodson's (1933) *The Miseducation of the Negro* inspired a strand of activism that emphasizes independence from the dominant structure in order to be culturally and materially self-determined, relative to educating Black children (i.e. CIBI). Woodson (1933) rendered a critical analysis of the state of Black education under white ownership, arguing in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* that Blacks in America had in fact been miseducated and further colonialized through a power mode that consistently foregrounds the Eurocentric self and liminalizes the Black-self. Woodson observed that "the same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples" (p. 20). Public education, he argued, was like the "seasoning" of Africans during the slave trade to make them nonresistant servants of white authority. Woodson, like Du Bois, exemplifies the constant presence of a Black intellectual consciousness and voice that can act by speaking truth to power in real time. They are historical examples of a particular method of Black male pushback against white systemic neo-colonialization, boldly rejecting that which privileges whiteness as "standard-ness" and demonizes Blackness as "substandard-ness."

Historic Control of Black Culture (Entertainment Industry)

White control of Black education has been a consistent theme in America since Africans were brought here and enslaved. This historical context (slavery) where Blacks were considered white property also influenced and facilitated the eventual white control over Black culture. The entertainment industry is profoundly illustrative of the systematic and historic white control of Black culture in America. Bogle (1993) in his work entitled *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films,* focuses on white ownership of Black culture by observing how the dynamics of control have played out historically in the film industry. He posits that since Black inclusion in film commenced in 1903 (Uncle Tom's Cabin) with Whites dressed in Blackface, control over the commoditization of Blackness had already been established. Tropes such as The Tom, The Coon, The Tragic Mulatto, The Mammy and the Buck were instantiated from the very beginning of the Black presence on film and as such heavily influenced the perception of how Blacks were viewed in reality.

Bogle (1993) offers a chronology of Blacks being dehumanized on screen for profit. Each decade, according to Bogle, saw Black actors being cast in roles that fit a particular stereotype. In the 1920s Blacks were portrayed as Jesters, giving way to the role of servants, primarily, in the 1930s. These tropes engrained themselves into America's popular imagination shaping low expectations of Black behavior and level of complexity. The 1940s through the 1980s presented Blacks on the screen in a manner that reflected the recycling and slight augmentation of the same tropes, particularly the Buck (1960s and 1970s) as the definitive characterization of the Black male (i.e. Jim Brown, "Shaft," "Superfly"). Control over these

tropes and their mass dissemination by the White male owned studios shaped the way Black males were perceived in real life by whites, which was either as an inferior or an enemy (i.e. Birth of a Nation in the early 1900s, Sweet Sweet Back in the 1970s, Trading Places in the 1980s).

Bogle (1993) highlights these image manipulation abilities of the studios and their power to create metrics that inform what type of Black is acceptable to whites by highlighting Sidney Poitier's rise to stardom. Sydney Poitier's calm and gentle affect, his educated articulation of words and sense of etiquette made him the chosen model of negro acceptability and the token integrationist actor for over two decades spanning from the 1950s through the 1970s. Poitier, as opposed to Roundtree ("Shaft"), was the ideal of what a Black man would have to portray in real life to be seen as human. Poitier, according to Bogle, was "the paragon of middle class values and virtues" (p.176). Poitier's handpicked rise as the white approved model of what a civilized Black male should look and act like is tantamount to the Michael Jordan campaign in the 1990s, where the clean shaven, corporate approved, Black male is lauded as the type of athlete all Black kids should aspire to be ("Be like Mike") as opposed to those perceived as defiant and urban like Mike Tyson or Allen Iverson.

Bogle (1993) highlights a voice of resistance, much like Carter G. Woodson's voice was to the intellectual arena. Oscar Micheaux, a fiercely determined Black filmmaker, single handedly established the Black market for films. His films were not only vigilantly independent but Micheaux used that independence to cast Blacks as complex beings on the silver screen, countering the tropes that permeated Hollywood (hooks, 1992). He not only employed Black actors that became household names for that time, but provided a venue within which they could apply their trade as a character that was human and multidimensional (Bogle, 1993; hooks,

1992). Micheaux's activism included making a film that villainized, pathologized and criminalized the white male as an inverted response to Griffith's KKK inspired Birth of a Nation. Corporate pushback against Micheaux's ability to foreground and humanize Blacks through film came in the form of exclusion through cooptation. The White studios, after seeing Micheaux develop a Black audience that would support the movie industry, began making movies starring Black actors, albeit the roles relied once again on the familiar tropes and stereotypes. Micheaux could not financially compete with the well-resourced Jewish controlled studios and died in relative obscurity

The negative tropes created and instantiated as common sense in the White owned film industry still persist and greatly impact aspiring artists such as the student participants in this research as well as professional artists like myself. Whether it be the classroom, the silver screen, or the world of radio, white control of the Black male body, through the ability to superimpose white male subjectivity onto Black identity, has persisted since the beginning of the modern entertainment industry. How do Black males in the industry perceive themselves in relation to this coopting, deculturalizing force? To what extent do they pushback? Why are these particular tropes (mammies, coons, bucks, toms, etc.) always accentuated? bell hooks (1992) reminds us that "black people have systemically challenged these narrow visions, insisting on a more accurate reading of Black masculinity" (p.89). She adds, "Contemporary Black men have been shaped by these representations" (p.89). According to Cox's (2011) *Dreaming of Dixie*, these images are nostalgic cues and reminders of the "lost cause" before industrialization when life was simple and the social order clearly favored whiteness over Blackness. Cox (2011) refers to the "lost cause" nostalgia as the key ingredient of "Dixie" as a brand. Purchasing Dixie was/is tantamount to buying a token symbolizing a white male dominated space of unfettered leisure

where slaves are happy to be slaves who entertained on demand as one of many southern comforts (Cox, 2011).

The packaging and selling of products that were material proxies for an imagined space where white male privilege and unquestioned authority were the expectation and rule became big business. Dixie, as a product, according to Cox (2011), was ironically being shaped and produced for mass (New York, Chicago, Hollywood) consumption by companies in the North. This selling of southern nostalgia through a contrived rendering of "Dixie" for public consumption occurred in radio, film and literature. Many classics such as "Amos and Andy" (minstrelsy), "Gone With the Wind" and "Birth of a Nation" that were consumed en masse relied on the tropes discussed by Bogle (1993), to narrowly define Black characters and distinguish them as lower in status and therefore under the control of the white characters. Narratives like "the happy slave" appearing in classic movies like "Gone With the Wind," minstrel shows, postcards depicting slaves picking cotton, and stamps showing similar imagery, entrench mythology into the realm of common sense. "Dixie" has entered our homes as Aunt Jemima syrup, Maxwell House coffee and a host of other products, and has carried with its slice of southern nostalgia the celebration of slavery and the desire to preserve the master/slave dynamic. This has been the nature if not the motivation of the White owned entertainment industry over its lifetime.

Contemporary White Ownership of Black Education

Neoliberal Imaginary and the Corporate Takeover of Schools

The neoliberal agenda operates from the premise that the free market is the most efficient means of structuring the lives of people in social environments (Cassell & Nelson, 2013). The term itself is misleadingly linked to Liberalism, which is characterized by the social democratic

policies of the State that were associated with the progressive reform movement of the late 1800s and implemented as a protective mechanism against the abuses of free market capital accumulation by the industrial elites (Cassell & Nelson, 2013). In order to protect citizens from displacement due to the rapid expansion of industrial urban centers in spaces that were formerly rural and agricultural, the state provided social safety nets for citizens in the form of social welfare and public education (Cassell & Nelson, 2013). The state distribution of public goods facilitated a more democratized ethic of social interaction and communalism, which tended to foster a model of human interaction based on social cohesion and cooperation as opposed to the competition based design of the marketplace.

The urban spaces, filled with urbanites who benefitted from the Keynesian Welfare State, became especially valuable in the eyes of those (neoliberals) who recognized their potential in terms of capital accumulation and proprietary expansion (Lipman, 2008). The neoliberalization of urban spaces began in earnest in the 1970s with "roll-back" neoliberal policies (Peck & Tickell, 2002) that sought to reduce federal funding for cities in an effort to halt investment in public infrastructure, institutions and public services (Lipman, 2008). Neoliberal policies that 'rolled back' public services and goods due to funding cuts, gave way to 'roll out' neoliberal policies (Peck & Tickell, 2002) that facilitated public-private ventures with the state apparatus as well as the push to privatize public services that were once state funded (Lipman, 2008). In this manner, the neoliberal imaginary has replaced government with a form of governance featuring economic deregulation. Cities within a neoliberal schema no longer compete within a national economic structure but aspire to become investment worthy to international investors (Lipman, 2008). In order to realize international investments in American cities, marketing and image become of paramount importance to the neoliberal agenda. The venues with the highest import,

in terms of marketing and branding within an urban developmental context, are real estate/housing and schools (Lipman, 2008; Saltman, 2010; Spring, 2015; Pedroni, 2011).

The central cities, having once been the locale for Keynesian State investments and developments (subsidized public housing, public health clinics and public hospitals) were home to large numbers of African Americans and Latinos (Lipman, 2008). These urban spaces, featuring low income communities, are perceived as prime spaces for the instantiation of the neoliberal imaginary through mechanisms such as "public-private partnerships, gentrification complexes, privatization, and de-democratization through mayoral takeovers of public institutions and corporate led governance bodies" (Lipman, 2008, p.121). The resulting attack on central cities including the black and brown bodies that occupy that space is tantamount to an exercise in "urban shrinkage as a performance of whiteness" (Pedroni, 2011). The manufacturing of privatized, white owned cities is rooted in the neoliberal imaginary's contempt of Blackness and its destruction of the Keynesian welfare state (Lipman, 2008 citing Katz 1989; Barlow 2003).

The same racialized discourses of pathology that justified the dismantling of the Keynesian state are employed through policy networks featuring think tanks, venture philanthropists, individual socio-political actors, and major corporations (Ball, 2012; Buras, 2008, 2011; Ahlquistet et. al., 2011; Spring, 2015, Saltman, 2010), Such discourses of Black pathology, such as the Moynihan Report (1965) and William Julius Wilsons' (1987) theory of underclass culture, enabled the rationalization of the destruction of public housing and the ensuing mass displacement of communities of color, new versions of spatial containment as well as categorical expulsion of Black and Brown bodies from the urban centers entirely (Haymes, 1995). The prevailing narrative about Blacks as a result of such pathological discourse

characterizes Blacks as disorderly, dysfunctional and dangerous, which is perceived by neoliberals as being bad for the city's image and subsequently, bad for business (Lipman, 2008, Ahlquist et al., 2011; Buras, 2011).

The neoliberal vision entails a necessary method of accumulation of Black space by pushing them out in a systematic manner, effectively dispossessing them of their property, space related identities, cultural and political ability to resist and the basic material ability to survive (Haymes, 1995). Black communities, in such a schema, become objects of disinvestment and neglect. The resulting blight allows the state to acquire property through property tax arrears and appropriate it to private investors. In order to affectively maximize the appeal of the "inner city" to potential investors, the neoliberal agenda must coopt and commodify urban schools, the last public institution that sustains the Black community. The neoliberal roll out of mixed income schools and housing are major contributors to the dispossession project. Such an enterprise creates the conditions wherein new schools and housing that are not intended for Black and Brown urbanites can exist and thrive within urban spaces under the mantra of choice and the pretense that proximity to white values and work ethic will serve as a cultural upgrade for Blacks (Pedroni, 2011; Lipman, 2008).

To pave the way for the emergence of charters, public schools must be problematized utilizing a market based culture of hyper accountability and urban educational reform policies that are set up to fail, such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) and the Race To The Top (RTTT) program (Lipman, 2011). A Nation at Risk (1983), a report released during Reagan's tenure as President, set the stage for what we see today as the corporate takeover of urban schools. It spawned top down, punitive based, hyper-accountability policies and also set the stage for what would become the militaristic culture pervading the charter movement. Within

this climate, standardization, efficiency, and an increased corporate sensibility became the elements that began to reshape the culture of public education (Lipman, 2011; Ahlquist et al., 2011; Spring, 2015; Ball, 2012; Buras, 2011; Saltman, 2010). According to Collins (2000), this is illustrative of the disciplinary domain that controls and manages oppression society-wide, which, by way of bureaucratic means, hides racism and sexism behind the veil of efficiency, rationality and equal treatment.

In order for the neoliberal project of public school privatization to be complete, however, the students must be demonized and criminalized in a manner congruent and consistent with the popular discourse about children of color propagated by mass media. Zero Tolerance policies in public schools reflect the "common sense" notions provided by the rhetoric of fear, control and surveillance associated with Black and Brown students (Giroux, 2011). Influenced by the sentiment contained within the Omnibus Crime and Safe Streets Act of 1968, Zero Tolerance policies in urban public schools have been nothing more than an extension of Reagan's War on Drugs and the privatization of the prison industry as well as the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Featuring the "Three Strikes" policy) (Giroux, 2011). Justified in the media-influenced public imagination as "the right thing to do," Zero Tolerance policies reify the extreme distrust of urban youth while they further entrench the idea that they are a generation of suspects, a depiction that has managed to follow urban students across venues, from "public" to "private" academic spaces (Giroux, 2011). In terms of its impact, Zero Tolerance seems to be a neoliberal tactic that functions as a "quick and dirty way of kicking kids out" instead of creating safe environments (Giroux, 2011 citing Goodman, 2000, p. 561).

As urban schools began to "underperform" according to the dictates of NCLB, neoliberals immediately moved to foreground the venue of education as a potentially lucrative

commodity in the marketplace. Neoliberals were able to use the hyper-accountability discourse to camouflage systemic shortcomings and focus any failure or underperformance on the individuals (teachers, students, parents, pathological culture) (Buras, 2015; Saltman, 2010). Mayoral control also contributes to the corporatization of urban schools through the appointment, rather than the democratic election of corporate actors to school boards, whose enactment of market place practices, including venture philanthropy (i.e. Broad, Walton, Koch Brothers and The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), shape urban school district policies and further entrench their scope of unregulated power through neoliberal governance (Lipman, 2011; Ball, 2012).

Post-Katrina New Orleans (Buras, 2015) as well as New York and Chicago are three of the leading cities experimenting with neoliberal governance in urban school districts. These districts and others feature new forms of racial containment and regulation of students of color while simultaneously capitalizing on their urban place marketing scheme that claims to value diversity for the sake of attracting foreign investors (Lipman, 2011). With most of the Blacks in these neoliberalized spaces displaced, those that remain are still kept in their place, so as to not bring the property value down within the schools they inhabit. The marketplace emphasis on efficiency, hyper-accountability, individual responsibility and de-democratization, coupled with the neoliberal belief in the perceived need to control and police Black bodies as the most effective means to ensure their academic achievement, sets the standard for the proliferation of a particular type of charter school.

These schools pride themselves on the same coercive, punitive, militaristic ethos that characterized the Zero Tolerance policies that contained and regulated black bodies in public schools. However, where urban public schools were targeted, stigmatized and shut down as a

result of such policies, these charter schools, containing the same suspect Black bodies, are branded as academically successful (high test scores) and thus worthy of being "chosen" as a superior product in the marketplace. The prevailing discourse attributes these schools' "success" to a culture that constantly exclaims to its urban students, that despite perceived individual obstacles, there will be "No Excuses!" What does that mean to an urban Black male in a classroom, receiving that message? How does that shape his social, emotional and intellectual being? The resounding but implied "or else" at the end of the phrase, "No Excuses" completes the threat that is often aimed at Black male youth in urban classrooms.

No Excuses Charter Schools

Within the larger trend of urban neoliberalism, the phenomenon of "No Excuses" charter schools are particularly salient as a new space for the containment and regulation of Black bodies and create an affective environment that resembles prison. The "No Excuses" school culture, in the name of being the best way to successfully educate Black children, reifies the notion that urban children are naturally deviant and in need of harsher "handling" than other children. In this regard, "No Excuses" charter schools began to resemble "police precincts" (Giroux, 2003) and may actually act as tributaries that funnel students into the school-to-prison pipeline. These schools not only represent the privatization and corporatization of public schools but the sanctioning and perpetuation of "institutional racism and systematic stratification" (Lack, 2009, p. 80). Parents who chose these privatized spaces to insure a quality education and the best chances to succeed academically for their children trade freedom and criticality in these militarized zones for a middle class, white imagined prescription that places heavy emphasis on obedience and social control (Lack, 2009).

"No Excuses" schools are typically high performing urban charter schools that feature an extended school day and school year as well as uniformity, intensive testing protocols and an extensive, highly structured behavioral system that relies heavily on rewards (merits or scholar dollars) and punishments (demerits, detention, suspension) (Golann, 2015). Examples of such schools include KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) and the Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academies. Bowles and Gintis (1976) point out in their correspondence principle that schools reflect workplace structures and teach working class children obedience, punctuality and deference to socialize them into working class positions, while middle class children are taught creativity, independence and assertiveness for the requirements of managerial positions. What this amounts to, is a hidden curriculum that stratifies and reproduces class differences amongst students that share the same space, much like the marketplace does, relative to race and access to upward mobility (Golann, 2015).

KIPP schools, which are predominantly African American and Latino, experience this military style education that is branded as an urban education panacea regarding college readiness and the production of model citizens. However, Ross et al. (2005) found that students rated the disciplinary policies as the worst thing about KIPP. On any given day at KIPP students can be seen but not heard, lined up in single file lines with some wearing their shirts inside out for behavioral violations (Thernstrom &Thernstrom, 2003). Others who have been sentenced for behavior violations can be seen in the "dugout" (Ross et al. 2005). This military education is reflective of the trend in corporate globalization whereby education is conflated with enforcement (Saltman, 2010). Those who choose otherwise "are driven out of KIPP because they can't uphold the contract, or because they simply decide that 62% more school time, two to

three hours of busywork nightly, and the militaristic social climate is just not for them" (Lack, 2009, pp. 144-145).

The punitive aspects of the zero-tolerance culture, whether on display at KIPP charter schools or in neighborhood public schools, affect Black and Brown students disproportionately compared to white students. Even in a city such as San Francisco, known to be one of the more liberal in the U.S., the disproportionate representation of Black and Brown bodies in school suspensions is staggering. African Americans make up 16 percent of the general population but 52 percent of all suspended students in the district (Piana, 2000). The very first year national expulsion data was released in the country, Blacks who comprise only 16 percent of the general population represented 31 percent of the total expulsions (Giroux, 2003 citing Elias, 2000, p. 9D). This facilitates and legitimates decisions made by the state and local school administrators to spend the bulk of their allotted resources on security as opposed to repairs or salaries for teachers. Surveillance devices, metal detectors, and security fences become more of a priority than educating Black and Brown children (Giroux, 2003). Not surprisingly, this push towards punitive based social control of Black and Brown bodies is rooted in perceptions and representations of race in the popular imagination of whiteness.

Representations of Race and Punitive Forms of Social Control

Neoliberal urbanism at its root is about the binary that exists between public/private and blackness/whiteness. In the neoliberal context, Blackness is a representation, created for the sole purpose of being negated in the white imaginary (Leonardo, 2013; hooks, 1992; Omi &Winant, 1994). Race is predisposed to material consequences because of our subjective interpretation of the manner in which it is performed, which becomes instantiated and made flesh through policies that directly impact life chances as exemplified by the link between "racialized perceptions of

intelligence, standardized tests and tracking practices" (Leonardo, 2013). From an institutional perspective, in a world of white normativity/superiority, Blackness must be seen as anathema and thus inferior to whiteness in order to substantiate the superiority of Whiteness (Leonardo, 2013). For example, neoliberal discourse around the myth of the "Black criminal" which has captured the public imagination as a common-sense notion due to media and policy formation, falls short in terms of explanatory power without explanations of Black poverty and social isolation (Leonardo, 2013).

Certain gestures and body language displayed by Black bodies, especially males, are often perceived by Black and White teachers alike as threating. They are often understood to be a specific Black style that reads as a bad attitude through a demonstration of noncompliance to standards and a close identification with what teachers perceive as a lower-class style of behavior (Ferguson, 2001; Dance, 2002). Further, teachers weigh such projections of agency and self-identity as a measure of their academic potential, which impacts their decisions about placement in AP classes more so than the actual academic achievement exhibited by the child (Ferguson, 2001). More, this same subjective reading of behavior is behind the disproportionate representation of Black and Brown bodies when it comes to office and court referrals, suspensions and expulsions. These students, often Black males, carrying the "at risk" or unsalvageable label are tagged with futures of prison by teachers, and are often singled out disproportionately in comparison to classmates (Ferguson, 2001).

This has very real consequences when it comes to translations of body gestures and cultural expressions of identity. Consistent labeling as pathological not only tends to affect their self-concept but "when these representations become the dominant and consistent public associations for students of color, they begin to believe the representations" (Leonardo, 2013, p.

121). This self-fulfilling prophecy fuels the policy making machine of the neoliberal agenda and justifies, in an even more deep tissue manner, its legitimacy. Racialized and gendered policies are where the subjective translations of its representation "accomplish their meanness as a material force" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 138). As such, for Black males, their performance of masculinity is perceived in the white imaginary as "naturally" deviant and already adult, making the transition from school, as a place of social control, to prison, a "natural" and to a large degree, acceptable segue (Dance, 2002; Ferguson, 2001). In many states, including California and New York, more money is spent on prison construction than on higher education (Giroux, 2003). Consequently, many states are now hiring more prison guards than teachers as I study participants coming of age in this controlling/punitive context.

The rise of the prison industrial complex features over "3300 jails, over 1500 state prisons, and 100 Federal prisons in the US" (Heitzeg, 2009, p. 6). More, approximately 300 of these prisons are private for-profit prisons with over 30 of them being super-maximum facilities (Heitzeg, 2009). The proliferation of penal institutions in America is a tell-tale sign regarding its connection to profit for all parties involved. In this marketplace milieu, corporate contracts for cheap inmate labor, construction contracts, job creation for criminal justice professionals along with media profits from sensationalized crime reporting that serves the public as a form of reality entertainment are all sources of large scale profit for the entities so invested (Heitzeg, 2009). Due to the mass incarceration of largely poor and unemployed Black urban male youth, politicians and other opinion shaping entities are able to bolster their claims of lower unemployment and their perceived ability to secure white proprietary interests through rhetoric emphasizing "get tough on crime" and "public safety." Through such rhetoric and perceived effectiveness of a

hyper-security approach, increased funding for police and other agencies within the criminal justice system also becomes more justifiable and ubiquitous (Heitzeg, 2009).

Heitzeg (2009) highlights these policies in a manner that is profound in its comprehensiveness, revealing them as a legitimate mechanism for neoliberal profit and social control. He is worth quoting at length:

> And these policies-enhanced police presence in poor neighborhoods and
> communities of color; racial profiling; decreased funding for public education
> combined with zero-tolerance policies and increased rates of expulsion for
> students of color; increased rates of adult certification for juvenile offenders;
> mandatory minimum and three strikes sentencing; draconian conditions of
> incarceration and a reduction of prison services that contribute to the likelihood
> of recidivism; and collateral consequences that nearly guarantee continued
> participation in crime and return to the prison industrial complex following
> initial release- have major implications for youth of color. (p. 7)

Clearly, Black communities are not the beneficiaries of such tactics. On the contrary, they are actually the targets of these tactics which rob them of their economic, political and racial identity, agency and ultimately their relevance in an imaginary that projects private whiteness over public Blackness until it disappears.

Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) which are the communicative structures that disseminate the neoliberal ideas, norms and discourse that change the public perception of social problems supranationally, nationally and subnationally, literally work to construct the consent necessary for the neoliberal agenda to have maximum impact (Ball, 2012). TAN's are comprised of individuals and organizations that gain the most, politically, economically and racially, and

are largely motivated to materialize neoliberalized causes, values and ideas (Ball, 2012). These are the seemingly nebulous players (hidden hand) in the web of policy creation and deployment that seek to change international policy and make these changes real in the day to day lives of people around the globe. Highly organized and well-funded, these networks feature a complex web of players including: individuals, such as Milton Friedman, James Tooley and Ayn Rand; other networks such as school choice advocacy organizations, like The Education Breakthrough Network (linked to KIPP and the New Schools Venture Fund); think tanks such as The Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation; organizations like the National Center for Policy Analysis and Teach For America; and philanthropic foundations, including The Ford Foundation and the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation (Ball, 2012).

The neoliberal project seems all pervasive and many have ascribed T.I.N.A. (There Is No Alternative) status to the imaginary based on its forceful and highly methodical penetration of the world's popular imagination. However, modes of resistance to white domination, whether it be physical confrontation (i.e. Nat Turner, etc.) or discourse setting narratives like those of Du Bois and Woodson have always existed and subverted the monopoly of western thought/white supremacy. The corporate takeover of schools, which is tethered to displacement of whole communities through accumulation by dispossession strategies as well as the burgeoning ubiquity of the prison industrial complex, is only the tip of the iceberg. It is merely the material residue of a more intrinsic set of ideas and values that seem imperceptible except through the structures that distill neoliberal thought. Beyond education, a comparable structure of white control seeks to commodify and control Black culture.

Contemporary White Control of Black Culture

And thus, "what is the can?" to draw on the title of this dissertation. It is many things

depending on the historical period. During the post-Reconstruction era, for some, it was the

racialized (white) system of capital that commodified every aspect of society in the name of the

marketplace. For others, it was a function of the broad white imaginary that sees Blackness as

categorically subordinate and inferior in the "natural" order of humanity. For others still, both

Black and White, the "Can" is merely the particular amalgam of White philanthropic interests

that from the beginning shaped public education to be compatible with white conservative values

and economic security. For many who have been marginalized over time, including Black

students and other stakeholders, they identify with the aforementioned reality as the source of

their systematic containment and limited/scripted education that reproduces white power at the

expense of Black authentic creativity and self-determination. (Du Bois & Edwards, 2007)

Much like the history of Black education in the United States, the history of the

entertainment industry, particularly the Black music aspect, is a narrative dominated by white

ownership of Black cultural production (Brown, 2005; Koch, 1999; Souther, 2006). The "Can"

looms here too as a major issue related to Black containment in the music industry. The stories of

Black male artists across periods and genres from jazz to soul to rhythm and blues speak of

navigation through a system that values cultural products and not the people who produce them.

Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker in the late 1940s and early 1950s created "Bop." This was

an entirely distinct sound/genre within Jazz that allowed for more freedom of expression/voice in

response to the tightly structured, white composed, Big Band sound that had become mainstream

(Koch, 1999). The lines are not cleanly drawn however. "Bop," albeit a clear expression of Black

resistance to a cooptive industry dominated by white men, was at once a polarizing phenomenon

between Black and White musicians but also amongst Black musicians. A number of Black musicians who identified more with the big band mainstream/commercial interpretation of jazz expressly critiqued and pushed back against bop with the same fervor as the white mainstream (Koch, 1999).

In the 1960s and 1970s James Brown navigated an industry where the major labels such as CBS had primarily white artist rosters and owned a network of media outlets. The major labels appealed to the government to conduct investigations into small labels' use of "payola," via the cession of their publishing royalties for "spins" on mainstream stations politically tethered to the majors. This was a power move to keep the more popular smaller independent labels that featured Black artists from receiving airplay on mainstream radio stations. Brown's response to the major's display of economic and political power was retaliatory and liberative in intent. His response was to utilize rather than be subject to the power of money by starting his own record label, "Fair Deal Records" (Brown, 2005). By so doing Brown maintained control of his own master recordings and the authority to monetize them on his own terms (Brown, 2005), thus in effect subverting the status quo in terms of the manner in which whiteness as a proprietor traditionally controls production and distribution.

However, amongst the White capitalist music industry and interspersed within its narrative are examples of whites in positions of power who demonstrated greater recognition of the human value of Black artists and the art form. The Jaffe Family, white jazz enthusiasts that resettled from Philadelphia and who profited from the tourism trade in New Orleans by way of showcasing the brass band culture, exemplify such a phenomenon (Souther, 2006). Preservation Hall, as their venue was known in the 1960s, became a place where authentic New Orleans brass band jazz could be heard. More, it provided a venue that allowed local Brass artists that were

shunned by other tourist venues that wanted their musicians to play a tamer and more commercial sound to still earn money and respect (Souther, 2006). This was an exceptional case, as its support of local musicians was executed in a climate where other Bourbon Street clubs were less interested in preserving the true authenticity of the art form and empowering the local black artists/creators.

As opposed to featuring "New Orleans jazz" out of respect for its creators and the cultural significance of the art form, most clubs participating in the tourism trade were more interested in selling a Disney-like, limited and easily replicatable version of "New Orleans jazz" (Souther, 2006). Further, Preservation Hall provided not only an outlet from the normal white containment of Black artists while their art was tied to profit, but by allowing Black politicians and activists to hold regular meetings in the space, it also served to empower and respect the black community, while tourist-conscious contemporaries did quite the opposite (Souther, 2006). That said, the "authenticity" of Preservation Hall, which stood in stark contrast to more commercialized French Quarter music venues, created a distinct niche in the tourist industry, suggesting that interest convergence (Bell, 1980) between the Jaffe Family and local artists may have been at play.

Staxx Records is another example of a successful white owned label from Memphis in the 1960s, that by most accounts demonstrably valued the Black artists on their roster as people just as much as income generators (Gordon, 2013). Others may be of the opinion that although illustrative of a level of benevolence, Staxx Records' posture of showing goodwill towards black artists could very well be interpreted as strategic. Such an opinion does not deny the level of investment, but speaks to the *motivation* behind the benevolent behavior and how it may in fact be just as exploitive as other more obvious and direct examples. Such a critical viewpoint

perceives the behavior of Staxx as being a sublime but conscious manipulation of context with the intention to optimize its economic bottom line.

Thus, the argument can be made that Staxx's benevolent management style and broad range of artist friendly sensibilities, given the primacy of profit, is motivated by the view that creating a convergence involving specific interests (Bell, 1980) positively impacts profit. Put differently, the benevolent behavior of the label could be viewed as the application of a business model that seeks to reach the ends of financial success by way of its ability to effectively fabricate (purposefully attending to certain vital interests of black artists as a means to maximize profit and sustainability) what would appear to be an "organic, win-win situation" for black artists and the white label owners. In consideration of such examples that demonstrate white corporate respect for black cultural producers/artists, is the "can" to be defined as something more essential than white male corporate paternalism in action?

James Brown critiques the motivation behind the government probe into payola. It is poignant and revealing as it speaks to the notion that a fear of white women being sexually attracted to Black males is perhaps the motivating force behind the white push to control black cultural expression. He states, "The real fear that the majors played on was the social one. Allow your white daughters to listen to Black rock and roll today, and tomorrow they will be giving birth to Black babies" (Brown, 2005, p.118). Maybe the system of capital/money is synonymous with whiteness. In other words, whiteness in its proprietary supremacy reserves the right to "own" all things desired in its imaginary, including Blackness. Brown reflectively states, "After payola, I started thinking about how money represents the system, the machine and ultimately, the music, while the men who make it represent only their feelings" (Brown, 2005, p. 120). So, what would James Brown say the can is? Does his position regarding his motives to start his own

label and control his own artistic and economic fate speak to his perception of the "Can" as the system of capital itself?

In an even more contemporary context, Black culture and Hip Hop have become synonymous for many in society. Hip Hop and pop culture have also become virtually one in the same. Charnas (2011) speaks to this phenomenon stating, "Hip-hop supplanted rock and roll as the signature creative expression for a new generation." In its current iteration, Hip-Hop features the likes of bigger than life celebrities like Jay-Z whose Hip Hop/R&B wife and mega-star Beyonce recently headlined the super bowl halftime show. From Run DMC's million-dollar sneaker deal with Adidas to Master P, Puffy and Jay Z cracking the Forbes list (Charnas, 2011), Hip Hop has instantiated itself on the landscape of American society as a lucrative and impactful social, political and economic commodity. Opportunities for profit abound for those who may not even like the music.

The irony is that even though Hip Hop began as a Black and Latino youth cultural movement on the blighted streets of the Bronx in the late 1970s, the most successful independent record label in Hip Hop, Def Jam, came to prominence as a team featuring Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin (White male) and when it sold for $135 million, Simmons *along with* Lyor Cohen (White male) reaped the profit (Charnas, 2011). White males (i.e. Universal, Sony, Warner), in a larger sense, still control the flow of money through distribution and other means that inform the production of Black culture for sale. As controllers of and profit makers from Hip Hop production, the images and content that make the most profit are the preferred images in which to invest. Once corporate interests latched on to Hip Hop as an investment with major profit potential, then the corporate vision of what Hip Hop should be (i.e. Vanilla Ice, Eminem, Justin Bieber, Miley Cyrus) has enough backing and demand to be supplied in abundance (Charnas,

2011). What are the implications for self-determined Black maleness or femaleness remaining as the desirable face of Hip Hop?

Through negative and narrow media representations of Blackness, Whiteness has historically been able to control all phases of cultural production including how it is sold to those who consume it. The following "New Circuit of Culture" formulated by Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus in 1997, is also quoted at length in Childs (2015) and serves as a Cultural Studies construct that illustrates the manner in which each domain informs the next. It highlights how the Eurocentric worldview, administered through mass media, historically and currently dominates each phase of Black culture, from representation, identity, production and consumption, to regulation (Childs, 2015; Hall et al., 1997):

Representation

Cultural representation can be viewed as textual meaning in action. It is a lived system of language (symbols and signs) that includes verbal and non-verbal expression (i.e. music, written text, inanimate objects, electronic imagery). Its objective is the making of shared meaning and understanding (Childs, 2015). Hall et. al. (1997) posit that "meaning making doesn't just end at a pre-ordained point' (p. 5). They maintain that meanings are not just sent by producers and passively received by consumers; rather meanings are made actively during consumption through the use to which products are put in their daily lives (p. 6). Television shows, music videos and movies, accompanied by particular texts, have been the site of negative tropes being depicted by Blackness (i.e. criminals) (Bogle, 1993).

These negative representations of Blackness proliferate society and are accessible to the public (including Black youth) and have subsequently come to define what it means to be Black in American society's popular imagination (Childs, 2015). By extension, Black youth often form

a collective understanding of what behaviors, language and clothing styles define Black culture, through a barrage of limited, rearticulated media images. The negative media representations of Blackness that have saturated American popular culture for decades have shaped a mythology around deviant Black male behavior that at times, appears to have become embodied by many Black youth who are still in the process of shaping their identity (Dance, 2002). These narrow representations thus become overrepresented in the perceptions of the American public, including Black youth and white policy makers as to what Blackness is and how that should be articulated compared to whiteness.

Identity

Hip Hop is one of the most explosive Black cultural products to have instantiated itself on the American landscape (Chang, 2005; Rose, 1994; George, 2005; Kitwana, 2002; Charnas, 2011). Its dynamic appeal amongst youth, particularly urban youth, makes it a rich venue in which to observe white control and the way it impacts Black identity through its influence on Black cultural language production. Hip Hop, generally, as Black cultural text in motion, has become associated with negativity and as such defines for many in society (both Black and White) what it means to be Black (Childs, 2015). Hip Hop creates meaning ascribed to certain behaviors, objects, customs and those who identify with Hip Hop perform identity based on obeying these meanings. In this manner males in high school who sag their pants are showing their Hip Hop identity as a Black male. Unfortunately, this form of embracing Black identity is a success for the corporate interests who capitalize on the textual meanings produced by Hip Hop (slang, clothing brands and styles) but it also means that to the extent violence is portrayed as being part and parcel of Blackness, Black male youth will potentially embrace that behavior with the intent of expressing authentic Blackness.

This identification by many Black youth with a media articulated, deviant Hip Hop as Black culture facilitates the perpetuation of categorical criminalization of Black youth and the punitive consequences that often come with it (Dance, 2002). Meanwhile, those Black youth who are merely attempting to express what they have consumed and have come to identify with as authentic Blackness are perceived as being oppositional to the norming function of white supremacy (Childs, 2015; Ferguson, 2001; Franklin &Higginbotham, 2009; Ruffner-Caeser, 2012). Hall (1980) speaks to this phenomenon where the viewer (i.e. Black youth) recognizes the dominant televisual codes and opposes them. He theorizes the extent to which the viewer's oppositional position facilitates a decoding of references made about them as being negative, further confirming their antithetical position (Hall, 1980).

Production

Production is the materialization of identity and representation as a venue through which text is rendered and made meaningful (Childs, 2015). In America, the mass media and Blackness have a transactional relationship where White corporate interests fund and articulate what elements qualify as Black culture, while Blackness, if not aware, runs the risk of consuming that articulation and embodying it as authentic (i.e. movies, music videos, fads, etc.) (Childs, 2015; Rose, 1994). The embodiment of white articulated Blackness when it occurs, may become shared and internalized by Blacks as authentic Black representation during the production domain. In the case of production, the hyper violence and hyper sexuality of Hip Hop that is articulated is also what the white media articulates as African American-ness (Childs, 2015). In contemporary times, many Black youth are impacted by external perceptions shaped by the daily barrage of negative media stereotypes and may even be compelled to become these corporate media driven, stereotypical representations. That Black youth have to navigate the lure and the stigma of such a

compulsion holds major implications for zero tolerance policies, prison referrals and overrepresentation of Black males, relative to each.

Consumption

In the consumption domain, meaning making is dynamic (Childs, 2015; Hall et. al., 1997). Although the producer encodes it, the consumer actively decodes and articulates that meaning through the use to which the product is put by them in everyday life (Childs, 2015; Hall, 1980; Hall et al., 1997) This domain is where the tension between youth and adults emerge over meaning of cultural products (i.e. the "N" word) due to the creation of meaning by the youth that is apart from the adult world and their traditional ascriptions of meaning (Childs, 2015). This Black youthful unpredictability around their assignment of meaning to products is a threat to authority (White and Black) and ultimately must be contained.

Regulation

Given the unpredictability of youth in terms of creating meaning, monied and moral interests seek to systematically control/regulate the language of Black youth so that it reinforces instead of contradicts prevailing narratives of criminality and deviance, especially for males. By the end of the cycle, under mass media influence, Hip Hop culture is perceived as criminal and synonymous with Black culture (Childs, 2015). This grants the media license to continue articulating Black text as negative and further entrenching this characterization by censuring videos of Black artists (predominately males) while media influenced school systems who also articulate Black text as negative/deviant censure student's language through dress codes and punitive policies (Lipman, 2011; Ferguson, 2001). Often times the resulting tension results in Black youth behaving in ways that justify the negative stereotypes that prevail in society.

Subsequently, the perception that Blackness is deviant and to be feared is further validated (Childs, 2015; Heitzig, 2009; Dancy, 2014)

These domains speak to the process by which white corporate elites control Black cultural production, particularly Hip Hop, or at least attempt to do so, yet artists throughout entertainment history have pushed back against the negative articulation of Blackness, the cooptive tendencies of the corporate interests, and the tendency of many Black youths to literally consume and represent the stereotypes. That said, even the most successful and mainstream rappers "are far more vulnerable to censorship efforts than highly visible rock artists, and they continue to experience the brunt of the plantation-like system faced by most artists in the music and sports industries" (Rose, 1994). Further, Black Hip Hop artists frequently experience white pushback when it comes to accessing white owned space in order to perform and earn money from their music, independent of their record labels. Venue owners as well as insurance companies have the right to refuse or charge inflated rates to Black Hip Hop artists and often do exercise their exclusive options. For a commercial rock group to perform, a typical rate may be upward of $20,000 to $60,000 dollars to insure the venue. Contrastingly, insurance to secure a venue for a Hip Hop show ranges from $500,000 to between $4-5 million dollars (Rose, 1994).

Exclusion of Black bodies from whiteness as private property, as in the case of contemporary rap artists, has a long history in the entertainment industry and was applied in a similar fashion to the jazz era. New York City instituted cabaret laws in the 1920s in response to jazz music (Rose, 1994). These laws, which were spawned from negative racial attitudes towards Blackness, were intended to "protect white patrons from jazz's immoral influences" (Rose, 1994). The taboo appeal of rap, much like its predecessor jazz, attracts white youth who are fascinated with Black culture and enjoins them to identify with and consume the product

(Rose, 1994). Corporate forces in a capitalistic sense position themselves to maximize the profit potential from the white youth fascination with the Black cultural product (Hip Hop), while further containing and marginalizing the Black bodies who also consume and create the culture. As white corporate interests (Labels) cater to the white consumer's desire to experience Blackness by influencing the production process of rap artists and making it more accessible to white involvement, Black practitioners are rendered inauthentically commercial and fully commoditized (Rose, 1994).

Jazz artists of the 1920s resisted this cooptation and White control of their cultural art form. Bop, a form of jazz that is more intricate than mainstream versions and expresses highly complicated melodic and rhythmic patterns, was created by artists such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie as a means to reclaim ownership of their authentic Black art form (Rose, 1994). This form was not considered appealing to the mainstream (white) listeners and because of its distinct and complex language patterns, was not able to be coopted and mass produced for white profit. Black contemporary rap artists have also been known to pushback on several levels against white control of the art form during its lifespan. By 1990, the distribution of records to retail stores was controlled by six major companies, including CBS, Polygram, Warner, BMG, Capitol, EMI, and MCA (Rose, 1994; Charnas, 2011). The major labels who signed Hip Hop artists in the 1990s had large sums of money and a broad reach in terms of distribution. These labels also operated from a model that applied very strict controls and oversight over the creation process that determined the final product (Rose, 1994).

In the 1980s during the early years of hip hop, the genre established its presence as a viable cultural product and spawned highly street savvy independent labels (Tommy Boy, Profile and Def Jam) to which many artists who wanted more creative control than major labels would

allow over their content and marketing, signed recording deals (Chang, 2005; Charnas, 2011; Rose, 1994). However, not to be outdone as a profiteer and controller of the Black art form, as the major labels realized the more authentic independent labels were selling more units over time and could not be bumped out of the market place, they bought out the independent labels allowing them to operate semi-autonomously, and providing them with access to major distribution in order to maximize profits and regain control over the ability to articulate Black culture (Rose, 1994; Charnas, 2011).

Tensions resulting from censorship and negative characterization of Hip Hop youth by the media results in many types of pushback against the hyper policing/censorship of Hip Hop (mandatory explicit lyric labels on packaging, venue discrimination, excessive police profiling of Black youth) culture in Black communities, schools and in the entertainment industry itself. Many artists have engaged in direct lyrical protest though the content delivered in their music production. One of the most notable is NWA's 1989 *"Straight Outta Compton"* album release featuring a candid response to the criminalization and hyper militaristic behavior of police towards black male youth who appear to identify with Hip Hop culture:

> Fuck the police, commin straight from the underground
>
> A young nigga got it bad cause I'm Brown
>
> And not the other color, cause police think
>
> They have the authority to kill a minority.

From the 1990s to present times this candid and honest response (and others like this) to the built-up frustration of being suspected as a criminal because of skin color and media articulated notions of what it means to be Black, further justifies fear based policies to check Black male aggression and cultural expression. Zero Tolerance is one of the policy solutions to

the panic caused by the proliferation of Hip Hop (Black/Negative) culture in popular culture, which works to devalue Black youth (especially males) as humans and to add value as commoditized object.

In short, this form of containment and commodification of rearticulated Blackness creates a dialectic around the values that continue to proliferate society, courtesy of mass media, regarding Black youths, particularly the male who identifies with Hip Hop. The mass media articulates hip hop culture as defining Black culture, making the two interchangeable (Childs, 2015). The media conveys what images constitute "being hip hop" while the same images are being decoded by teachers as deviant and criminal. Such a narrow version of Blackness superimposed on Black bodies invites pushback that often further exacerbates the stereotypes (Childs, 2015). White owned mass media functions as a mechanism of white proprietary protection. Its ability to produce, disseminate and capitalize from rearticulated negative renderings of Black culture/language has been vital to the project of controlling it over time.

Keeping in mind this historical context, this research project explored what decisions present-day Black male students and artists make in the face of ongoing racialized power dynamics. These processes are informed by transactional patterns between blacks and whites over long periods of time in this country (Omi & Winant, 1994). Thus, this research builds on past scholarship as it explored some of the contours of the current iteration of racial formation. Further, it highlights and emphasizes the participants' thought processes and rationales regarding the manner in which they navigated such structures. This study attempted to understand how and why pushback occurred when it did and what that looks like, be it the formation of a new label, a new subgenre like "bop," or something more internal and less obvious. Narratives from Black male artists and students spoke to Black male navigation of white structures as they directly

addressed what they made of being in such a position and how they would define the "Can" in

the current era.

Chapter 3: Methods

As mentioned, this research project fills a gap in the literature by extending other research on Black males in structures of inequitable power to include multiple domains of experience (urban classrooms and the music industry) and their expressed processes regarding how they navigate and make meaning of their positionality within such structures. Towards achieving this end, much consideration was given to employing a research design that was methodologically and theoretically congruent with the research questions.

This research project focuses on the following research questions:

(RQ1) How do contemporary professional Black male recording artists navigate the recording industry's tendency to restrain their personal "voice" and creative agency in the process of commodifying their talents?

(RQ2) How do Black male youth navigate classroom spaces to maintain their personal "voice" and creative agency?

(RQ3) Are there similarities between the experiences of Black male artists in the music industry and Black males in the education system in the United States and how they navigate the power differential they face to retain their personal voice in the music making process and in classrooms?

Design of Study

The specific qualitative approach best suited for this research was the case study. Stake (1995) characterizes the case study as "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). Harmonizing with the exploratory and comparative function of the research questions guiding this study, this investigation treated each student's and artist's unique perspective as a case, as it explored

individual's experiences per their given contexts and compared their perceptions and navigation of power within those contexts. Stake (1995) speaks to the utility and appropriateness of case study for research that focused on education, pointing out that people and programs are best suited to represent cases. Stake (1995) offers a more detailed rationale for the use of case study that aligns with my own sensibilities. He states that people and programs in case studies are "similar to other persons and programs in many ways and unique in many ways. We are interested in them both for their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories" (p.1). Each participant's case was located within either of two distinct boundaries. The bounded structures/systems represented were the Hip Hop/Black music industry and the urban educational system.

Moreover, this qualitative research project can be characterized as a facilitator of creative expression via narratives from participants who self-identify as artists. As an artist who is also the researcher for this project, I am committed to push the envelope of tradition and pull from prior research that embraces more creative ways to elucidate themes that emerge in the data collection and analysis stage. It was my intention to present the data in a manner that preserved the dimensionality and ethos of the narratives rendered. More specifically, I employed an arts-based approach to ensure that I comprehensively and creatively captured the participants' individual and collective voices. My specific use of Arts Based Methods (ABM) was primarily influenced by the following examples from the academic literature.

Eaves (2014) focuses on presenting a rationale for advancing arts-based methods (ABM) in research/practice based contexts. Partially functioning as a mechanism that defines ABM, Eaves' (2014) rationale for its consideration as a viable research method also demonstrates that ABM approaches are valued for their ability to be utilized as a more contoured means of topic

engagement, reflection and intersubjective agreement. Eaves speaks to the use of several arts based techniques which span "handcrafted (drawing), digital (photography), hybrid (cartooning), performance dimensions (improvised installations) and music (metaphor and structure)" (p. 147). She posits that these approaches are engaging and empowering as they create discursive spaces that reduce barriers, support the progressive unfolding of thoughts and narrative (re)construction as well as the capacity to act on the emotions and concepts broached during the research process.

Of interest to this researcher was Eaves' (2014) notion that *fugue* can be employed as metaphor, particularly as it relates to the musical aspects of the participants' lived experiences. A fugue is composed by the juxtaposing of point and counterpoint, subject and countersubject with themes "repeated, expanded and altered through various voices in episodes, entries and finales" (Eaves, 2014, p. 148). Further, such a means of presentation appealed to my sensibilities as an artist/researcher because this approach treats/presents the participants' multiple voices as distinct but related at once, much like voices in a song.

Ledger and McCaffrey (2015) examine ABM in the context of how it can and should be utilized as research method in the field of music therapy. With less of a focus on defining ABM, these authors review the ABM literature as related to various ways it has been applied to music therapy research. The authors suggest that arts based research (ABR) is new territory and should be conceived as a flexible research strategy rather than a static method (Ledger & McCaffrey, 2015). This epistemological premise resonated with me and for this reason these authors provided few details regarding models to be replicated. However, this notion put forth by Ledger and McCaffrey (2015), that the application of ABR not only *could* but *should* be within a framework that is flexible enough to capture data in a manner most complimentary to the respective research project, impacted my willingness as a researcher to break with traditional

constraints and creatively approach designing the data collection, analysis and presentation aspects of my research project.

Patricia Leavy's *Method Meets Art*: *Arts-Based Research Practice* (2009) offered a more concrete understanding of how ABM could potentially look when practiced, providing many examples of ABM by aesthetic focused scholars. Of particular note was an example from Daykin's (2004) research in the UK, elucidating how she utilized and included music in a qualitative research project. Her research explored the impact of insecurity and ill health in the flexible world of music work (p. 40). Daykin posited that "within music work, finding acceptance within particular fields and in relation to particular aesthetic judgments is crucial to success" (p. 40). She adds, "Such judgments are influenced by underlying ideas about the nature of creativity, which extend beyond the arts to include a range of spheres. Hence, the notion of creativity, both as a received idea and a personal discourse shaped by the musician/worker can be an important mediator of experience" (p. 40).

Leavy outlines the two-phased approach that Daykin applied to her research project that employed narrative analysis to "explore notions of creativity as these were challenged and reworked in response to disruptions such as ill health" (Leavy, 2009). She interviewed thirteen musicians to illicit narratives that she posits often represent the reworking of creativity discourse. Daykin also harmonizes with Eaves (2014) regarding the role of representation when she expresses her realization that "In music, voices can speak together without negating one another" (p. 127).

Phase one of Daykin's (2004) research project, focuses on the "key metaphors" that emerge from the participants' creative identities as articulated by the narratives rendered from the interviews. These key metaphors emerge from stories that are more than attempts to make

sense of struggles and strains, they are cultural critiques of "dominant notions of creativity at work that serve to reward some identities and diminish others" (Leavy, 2009, p. 131). Phase two focuses on the "sound worlds" of the participants. In each musician's world, there exists a particular sound signature unique to their sensibilities as an ethnocultural music producer. The extent to which the participants have been forced to change their sound world in the face of "difficult circumstances" reflects a self (re)evaluative process in the face of powerful external circumstances. It implies a forced devaluation of their musical and personal identities in favor of the perceived power of the phenomenon/disruption (Leavy, 2009).

Daykin's research places this experience of altering one's sound world in the context of health or illness being the external impediment toward the maintenance of one's natural sound world. My current research parallels Daykin's in that instead of illness or health potentially altering the sound worlds of the participants, the very structures they navigated potentially operated in ways that compromised the sound worlds of these participants. In both cases, the external phenomenon altered their ownership of and freedom to create literal "sound" in a manner most representative of their perceived musical/cultural identities. This is similar to Souther's (2006) depiction of the suppression of New Orleans Brass Bands by the local tourism minded venues. Phase two explores the impact of these sound worlds as representational devices as well as mechanisms for gaining and generating new insights (Daykin, 2004; Leavy, 2009). To this end Daykin invites her participants to offer music that resonates with them with respect to key themes emerging from the narratives. The inclusion of music as metaphor creates a "sound" space that at once honors each individually expressed "sound world," and becomes a device that perpetually extends the initial interview of the research study. It accomplishes this through a

process that stimulates sustained analysis by attracting new audiences to experience, interpret, and perhaps appreciate these sound worlds.

More, speaking further to the notion of using music as data, Leavy references a study by Jenoure (2002), where she developed two methods. The first device developed by Jenoure is known as "performance collage" (Jenoure, 2002), which entails coding and writing up data that culminates in a musical performance. The second method is "musical portraiture" (Jenoure, 2002), an approach that codes data using musical structures, the result being "sonic narratives" which she likens to jazz riffs (Leavy, 2009, p. 109). I employed a methodology that combines both. I departed somewhat from Leavy's musical portraiture as I did not use musical devices/terms such as crashes or vibrato in the coding phase, but literally had the participants offer sounds and whole songs to comprise their "sonic conversations," which I wove together to represent the "performance collage" (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002) methodological function featured in chapter 6.

Data Collection

This project utilized various elements of Daykin's (2004) two phase approach to data collection and analysis. It also employed the fugue dynamic articulated by Eaves (2014) in the analysis and presentation of the data, including my autobiographical voice when viable. My employ of the two phases slightly differed from Daykin. Phase one focused on key metaphors, which were enhanced by the use of photo elicitation as an interview method. The actual photos themselves were purposefully offered by participants as metaphors that spoke to a range of experiences. Thus, key metaphors were generated on two fronts in the original interview (photos themselves and the narratives that emerged from the photos). In phase two, my project extended

Daykin's approach by requesting that participants offer music as well as color and other non-musical, metaphorical examples of sound.

Specifically, the interview process for this study featured four interviews belonging to a two-phase process (See Appendix C for visual layout). The first three interviews were considered components of phase one and the fourth interview/reflective elicitations addressed the participants' sound world and their perception of the "Can," serving as the defining components of phase two. This research borrowed from various elements (i.e. key metaphors, fugue, performance collage, sonic conversation, two-phase approach, sound world, flexible structure) employed and highlighted by the aforementioned scholars. The manner in which I have incorporated these elements is unique to this research project. Data collection primarily relied on interviews.

The first interview was approximately 45-60 minutes. This interview was semi structured and featured a protocol of approximately 8 questions including follow up questions that established a baseline narrative that spoke to each of the 6 participant's (students and artists) navigational experience of white power structures in school and the music industry (see Appendices A and B for sample questions). Both groups were asked questions, utilizing the same protocol, which addressed the manner in which they navigated their respective structures. Immediately following the completion of the first round of interviews for each participant, I asked them to take a week and reflect on the experiences they shared and generate photos that relate to or resonate with their expressed experiences. These photos could either be still photos that they have taken or ones that already exist in various media sources (magazines, text books, still shots from visual media, etc.).

Once they took or found the photos that resonated with them regarding their experiences, I followed up with them and conducted another 30-45-minute interview based on the photos they presented to me. Note that all images with the exception of those so attributed qualify for fair use or are expressly exempt from attribution requirements per their source, Pexels.com. Next, I presented each participant with excerpts from the initial two interviews, including quotes from artists and students, with instructions to reflect comparatively upon them and be prepared to share any thoughts via an "excerpt elicited" interview of 30-45 minutes, to be conducted after their receipt of the excerpts. In real time at the conclusion of the first phase of interviews I asked the participants to take a couple of minutes and provide a color, sound and word that captures how their expressed photo elicited narratives makes/made them *feel*. These elements taken together—narrative accounts, photos, excerpt elicitations, and colors-sounds-words—revealed "key metaphors" that characterize phase one according to Daykin's model.

Phase two of Daykin's model required the addition of a musical selection by the participants to further personalize their unique perspective around their experiences and the metaphors generated in phase one of the process. I asked the participants to take two to three days after the completion of the first round of interviews and provide between two to three songs (either original or by other artists from any genre) that emanated from their metaphorical offerings in phase one (i.e. photos, words, sounds, colors). This also included the provision of a word, phrase or a short paragraph by the participants defining "the can." They rendered this at the conclusion of the second round of interviews.

The second phase entailed one last 30-45 minutes interview related to their definition of the can as well as an audio elicited interview based on their "soundtrack" (i.e. the musical selections chosen by them). The analysis of these "sound worlds" and what they collectively

express was rendered through the creation of a visual fugue of music, sounds and lyrics that creatively blended common as well as uncommon elements of their experiences and accompanying metaphors into one cohesive musical piece or performance collage.

Sampling and Criteria

My research employed purposeful sampling in order to achieve a sample size of 6 participants. Out of the 6 participants, there were three professional Black, male, Hip Hop recording artists and three Black, male students who also aspired to be artists. Criteria for participant selection included a willingness to speak freely in an interview setting and commitment to be available for follow up interviews. Additionally, the three Black male artists who serve as participants should have been signed directly to or distributed by a major label at some point in their career. This was vital in terms of being able to draw from actual experiences that featured interaction with the concrete, formal structures (major labels) directly representing the larger white, corporate interests that control the recording industry. The three Black, male students who participated in this research study ranged in age from 19-21. These participants were required to be graduates from high schools considered to be situated in an urban environment. They were required to be no more than two years removed from their high school experiences. Each student participant also self-identified as an aspiring artist in the music industry. This sensibility and self-definition as one who aspires to be a professional artist facilitated a deeper congruence to the artists, outside of just being a black male and a former student. It also emphasized the relative similarities between the two structures that both groups of artistically inclined/creative Black bodies were attempting to navigate and allowed for rich comparative analysis. Finally, I focused on Black males because I am a Black male student who is also a professional vocal artist and have done extensive community work with this population.

Site Selection

The sites selected for this study were based on a couple of considerations. Of the several things that were considered, familiarity with the artists was a major factor. Gaining access is very important with regard to conducting research. My prior establishment of a positive rapport with the artists, increased the feasibility of my gaining access to interview them for this project wherever they are willing to be interviewed. Each artist was interviewed via phone for each of their four interviews. The availability and comfortability of the students was also a major consideration in terms of the actual site where the interviews could take place. The literacy clinic at room 100 in Dahlburg Hall was the primary available site on Georgia State University's campus where several interviews were conducted. However, due to time and money constraints, the majority of the student interviews were also conducted by phone.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted utilizing first and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2013). This project utilized three first cycle coding methods in order to capture as comprehensively as possible the elemental as well as the affective aspects of the narratives rendered by the interviews and the documents. (Saldana, 2013). Once both phases of interviews were complete, I began by applying a structural coding scheme (Guest et al., 2012; MacQueen et al., 2008; Namey et al., 2008) to the data in order to organize the elements of the narratives according to the research questions. I then applied descriptive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2003; Wolcott, 1994) to the data that was structurally coded in order to highlight other relevant details in the data set. Whenever possible the descriptive codes also doubled as In Vivo codes (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987;

Strauss & Corbin, 1998), highlighting an exact word or phrase of the participants. (See Appendix D for sample page from code book)

Equally as important as the elemental aspects of the data as related to the research questions, were the affective components that speak to *how* they experienced to add to the *what* provided by structural coding. Thus values coding (emphasizing beliefs, values and attitudes) was also applied to the same data set that had already been structurally and descriptively coded. This layer of coding was particularly important as it elucidated and facilitated the expression of a rich narrative that supported the *what-how-why* of the participants' sound worlds, including the deeper meaning and intent behind their self-selected key metaphors (i.e. colors, words, pictures, songs). The secondary coding cycle employed axial coding (Boeije, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to organize the primary cycle codes and condense them into the four broader themes that emerged which considered the research questions as well as the extent to which the data reflected the presence of *interest convergence* (Bell, 1980) and *whiteness as property* (Harris, 1993).

The phased manner in which students' and artists' stories unfolded as well as the strong appearance of trial and error as an original organizing theme, lead to a pervasive trend in the data sets, which I reflected on in my fieldnotes. The participants' narratives commonly spoke to the point of entry into their respective structures as being characterized by an "I'll figure it out/trial and error" approach. As I further analyzed the data, the idea of bending but not breaking was also ubiquitously expressed in the data sets, which over time lead to a progressive experiential knowledge base that was shared by each participant, temporally and qualitatively. This educative process of acclimation into their respective new environs began to thematically emerge,

culminating in a shared experiential progression including the following 4 phases: "I'll Figure it Out," "Peep Game," "New Attitude," and "Experience is the Best Teacher."

Theoretical Framework

The history of education and entertainment in America as related to Black involvement has been one primarily characterized by white control (Anderson, 1988; Brown, 2005; Koch, 1999; Souther, 2006; Watkins, 2001). The title of this research project, "Soul in a Can," refers to the notion that white economic interests have historically controlled Black bodies through systematic means designed to value cultural output as a commodity more than the Black body that produces and in some cases, is the product. As a metaphor for the phenomenon of white commodification of blackness at the expense of its producers' humanity, "Soul in a Can" begs the question: what exactly is this "Can" that serves to package and contain black expression, selling the soul and physical being of the black cultural producers along with the commoditized fruits of their labor? Is the can merely capitalism itself as a system? Is it the collective imaginaries of like-minded white men who have a similar world view? Or is it perhaps an arrangement between the Black producer and the white commodifier, predicated on a tacitly agreed upon interest convergence between the two? As a "Can," what does the containment structure look like in the entertainment industry and the educational system throughout history? Does the can change over time? More, at what cost to the producers did the can influence their image, identity and value as it controlled the image, identity and value of the product?

This notion of the can is linked to issues of power and ownership. It is particularly connected to white power, capitalism and its impetus/motivation towards ownership and control over Black life. The use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is requisite as a frame for research that explores the impacts of systematic use of race to subordinate and marginalize populations. I used

this framework as a means to analyze the power dynamics related to the data rendered by the artists and students participating in the study. In part, CRT was born as a reaction to slow response to Civil Rights Legislation by scholars of color, including Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier and Kimberlé Crenshaw. CRT emphasizes the unconditional acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of systemic whiteness as a "particular legal and political structure rooted in the ideology of White European supremacy and the global impact of colonialism" (Taylor, 2009). As a framework CRT is predicated on five major insights/observations:

1. Racism as Normal: Racism is endemic or a normal fact of life;

2. Interest Convergence: Black gains in equality only occur when their interests converge with that of whites and these gains will be as minimal as possible; (Bell, 1980).

3. Historical Context: CRT grounds itself in a specific historic context and recognizes that the contours of racism change over time;

4. Narrative-knowledge creation: People of color are the sources of authority based on lived experience, as their narratives connect them to a long tradition of self-expression and a culture that foregrounds standpoints of the oppressed (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006);

5. Whiteness as Property: Under the system of slavery white identity and property became conflated such that whiteness and white identity were sources of privilege and protection. Whiteness became the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings (Harris, 1993).

Whiteness and that which is perceived by whiteness to be an asset in these contexts functions as a form of property that protects those who possess it or have access to and

acceptance by it (Harris, 1993). In exploring how the racial component of the "Can" functions and perhaps what comprises it, for purposes of this research I particularly drew on Cheryl Harris's (1993) theory of *whiteness as property* and Derrick Bell's (1980) theory of *interest convergence* from the Critical Race Theory (CRT) literature. More specifically, Harris argues, "In the form adopted by the United States, slavery made human beings market-alienable and in so doing, subjected human life and personhood—that which is most valuable—to the ultimate devaluation" (p.1720). She further elucidates the point, adding, "Because whites could not be enslaved or held as slaves, the racial line between white and black was extremely critical; it became a line of protection and demarcation from threat of commodification, and it determined the allocation of the benefits and burdens of this form of property" (p. 1721).

The ownership of *whiteness* as property by whites, according to Harris, includes the very right *to own* as an exclusive privilege of whiteness. More, that which is not white or has not been granted a reprieve by whiteness is automatically by default subject to ownership. When I refer to *whiteness as property* as a point of analysis in this research project, I am referring to the owners of whiteness and the extent to which they exercise their proprietary rights as owners to exclude or include whomever as they see fit on terms that they define. In a similar way, Bell (1980) contends that the principle of "interest convergence" means "The interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). He adds, with respect to the *Brown* decision: "However, the fourteenth amendment standing alone, will not authorize a judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for blacks where the remedy sought threatens the superior societal status of middle and upper-class whites" (p. 523). Put differently, even when interests converge between white and black and there are some gains in terms of equity, there is still a dearth in the quality of the "equity" being gained.

In sum, both WP and IC, as theoretical constructs of CRT, were utilized in analyzing data for this study. These constraints are discussed and applied in later chapters.

Ethical Concerns

While a requirement for participation entails a willingness to be candid regarding participation within a label structure, there is a potential for backlash from the label for candidly voicing discontent or unfavorable sentiment towards the labels, which could have potentially damaging effects in terms of job security going forward. In consideration of such a potential impediment to conducting this research, I conducted a "pilot study" featuring Talib Kweli, a reputable Hip Hop artist/activist who expressed that artists in this current iteration of the Hip Hop industry are less concerned about pushback from labels for voicing their discontent. The major risk for artists, according to Kweli, is the extent to which they draw criticism from fans for a particular action or comment they may make.

That said, Kweli provided several compelling illustrations of artist conflict with labels, foreshadowing the importance of this research. Regardless, I mediated risk by interviewing artists who were already publicly recognized as outspoken on issues of race and power who have also transitioned to being independent artists. Because I am a professional artist as well, there may be a bias toward the plights of the artists and students interviewed. Because I am an educator and champion of the well-being of Black males, there may also exist a bias in my analysis of the data in that regard as well. I occasionally engaged in textual based dialogue with respected peers (i.e. scholars and community members) in order to gain feedback regarding potential bias in my analysis. At the same time, in the tradition of CRT, my position as a Black male student and artist lent unique insight into the experiences of the participants.

Chapter 4: Findings—Artists

The purpose of the study was to explore how professional black male recording artists and black male students deal with the way unequal power works in the recording industry and the classroom. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do contemporary professional Black male recording artists navigate the recording industry's tendency to restrain their personal "voice" and creative agency in the process of commodifying their talents?

2. How do Black male youth navigate classroom spaces to maintain their personal "voice" and creative agency?

3. Are there similarities between the experiences of Black male artists and Black males in the education system and how they navigate the power differential they face?

This chapter contains two sections. *The first* introduces the artist participants and presents brief profiles of each. The participants consented to using their actual names in this research project in an effort to reflect maximum authenticity. *The second* section introduces the major themes and presents data to support the axial themes that emerged from the interviews. This section also includes an analysis of the role played by Whiteness as property and Interest convergence in the power dynamic of each overall experience. Appendix F includes a glossary of terms related to Hip-Hop and the music industry, which may be helpful in understanding participants' testimony.

4.1   The Participants—Artists

Three Black male recording artists currently residing in three different metropolitan U.S. cities including Atlanta, Washington, DC. and Philadelphia, participated in this study. Each of them participated in the four individual interviews.

Individual Interviews

The individual interview participants were similar in terms of age. Three artists, Akil, Deric Angelettie (D-Dot) and Tracy Lee are 50, 49, and 47 years of age respectively. The participants were more diverse in terms of their educational experience. Akil is a high school graduate. Both D-dot and Tracy Lee attended Howard university. While attending Howard, D-Dot majored in Allied Health up until his junior year and Tracey Lee graduated from Howard with a degree in Communication. Lee continued to matriculate and earned a Juris Doctor degree from Southern University Law Center.

Below is a detailed description of the participants. Their own words have been used wherever appropriate to provide a more comprehensive sense of their identities.

Akil the MC. Akil the MC, born Dante Givens, is a 50-year-old Black male presently residing in Atlanta, Georgia. Akil was born and raised in Los Angeles and is a founding member of the Los Angeles, California based hip hop group Jurassic 5. The two most successful of the four major albums released by Jurassic 5 on Interscope records between 1999 and 2007, peaked at #15 on the Billboard 200 chart. Akil played a major role in the success of the group, contributing as an MC, song and chorus writer, producer, live show coordinator, DJ as well as the group's resident networker. In person, Akil, as most people refer to him, is slight in stature, brown skinned and stands at about five feet, four inches in height. Still in shape from his days as a B-boy (break-dancer), his youthful demeanor and appearance are contrastingly framed by a

head of completely gray, shoulder length, dreadlocks that have been that way since he was in his twenties. As a long-time practicing Muslim, Akil's easygoing and jovial disposition typically shares space with a very reflective and insightful spirit. Aside from his rap music persona as *Akil the MC from Jurassic 5*, he describes himself as a person/human:

> My given name is Dante Givens…so…then I ended up taking on Akil, which means wise or intelligent…the part of the brain when you come up with sound decisions. It's called your 'Akl.' That's what the real pronunciation is. That's where your reasoning faculty is. I think that came later, but it just added to what was, who I feel I am already…someone striving to want the best for myself.

Tracey Lee*. Tracy Lee is a 47-year-old African American male who currently resides in Washington DC. Lee, a Hip Hop artist and an entertainment lawyer, is a native of Philadelphia, where he attended Girard College, a predominately black boarding school in the heart of the city. In 1988, Tracey Lee enrolled as a freshman at Howard University where he graduated with a degree in communication. Impacted by the ups and downs of the recording industry, Lee continued to matriculate and received his Juris Doctor degree from the Southern University Law Center, making him the first former, major label artist to qualify himself as "Esquire."

As a rapper, Lee landed a recording contract in 1997 with By Storm/Universal where the release of his single "The Theme" from the debut *Many Facez* LP, made him an overnight success. The single lasted for 37 weeks on Billboard's Top 100, becoming Gold certified (sold 500k units) over that span of time. Lee released a follow up album, *Live From the 215,* in 2000 on the By Storm/Universal label and in 2014 independently released *ESQ: The Revelation,* on LLeft Entertainment with digital distribution courtesy of TuneCore. As a respected rapper in the industry, Lee has collaborated with many prominent artists including The Notorious B.I.G.,

Kanye West and Busta Rhymes. As a lawyer, some of his clients include Grammy-nominated

artist Eric Roberson, Invisible Productions (for Kelly Rowland, Solange Knowles and Kobe

Bryant) and DJ Young Guru (Former tour DJ and Engineer for Jay-Z)

Tracey Lee the person has a warm, laid back demeanor. As soon as he speaks the strong

colloquialisms and Philadelphia accent, they become prominent features of his personality. Lee

stands about 6 feet with a medium frame and has a brown complexion. As an artist who is

conscientious about equity and social justice, Lee is often passionately expressive when speaking

to those issues. When asked how he viewed himself as a human/person, his response was:

> I think I'm a humanitarian…meaning, I have the utmost respect for life! All
> parts…whether it be plant, animal (chuckle) you know what I mean …but I just have a
> respect for life period…the utmost respect for life…so that's really my make-up
> man…That's how I walk…that's how I talk…that's how I live my day to day…very
> spiritual cat…a firm believer in God…supreme being and whatever you want to call
> it—or call him or call her…

Deric D-Dot Angelettie. Deric Angelettie is a 49-year-old male, currently residing in

Pennsylvania, whose ethnic make-up includes a Puerto Rican mother and an African American

father. Deric was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York and attended Tilden High school.

Angelettie has several aliases (D-Dot, The Mad Rapper, Papa Dot and D.O.P.), each of them

emblematic of the broad skill set he represents within the music industry. Most often referred to

as D-Dot, Angelettie is an MC, music producer, songwriter, artist, manager and entrepreneur. D-

Dot began his rap career in 1990, while at Howard, as a member of *Two Kings in a Cipher*, with

fellow Howard University undergraduate and friend Ron "Amen Ra" Lawrence. Their first

album, *From Pyramids to Projects* was released in 1991. While attending Howard D-Dot also

became close friends and business partners (A Black Man/Puerto Rican Production) with fellow New Yorker and Howard University contemporary Sean "Puffy" Combs.

Their history of partnership and success culminated in D-Dot officially joining Combs' Bad Boy Entertainment company in 1993, and becoming director of management and merchandising. From 1994-1996 he managed Multi-Platinum R&B Icon, Mary J. Blige. From 1996-1998, Angelettie was the lead producer for Puffy's production team known as The Hitmen, during which time he was nominated for three Grammy's and became the recipient of a NARAS Award for "Producer of The Year" in 1998. In this capacity, he wrote and produced multiplatinum songs for Jay-Z, Eminem, 50 Cent, and others, including Puffy's "It's All About the Benjamins". D-Dot also performed and made appearances utilizing the persona of a novelty rap character he created known as The Mad Rapper. The Mad Rapper can be summed up as purposefully cynical and perpetually unsatisfied with all that he encountered to the point of becoming comedic (i.e. grumpy smurf as a rapper). The character became a hit with fans as it debuted on Notorious B.I.G.'s multiplatinum LP, Life After Death. In total, D-Dot has sold over 30 million records as an artist, songwriter and producer.

In person, Angelettie exudes the no-nonsense, forward moving, appearance savvy, quick thinking ethos of Brooklyn. Regarding his physical countenance, D-Dot stands at close to 5 feet 10 inches tall with a medium build and fare complexion. When engaged, his quick wit and candid delivery tend to facilitate highly entertaining but intellectually provocative conversations. D-Dot shares, in his own words, how he sees himself as a human/person:

The human being, Deric Angelettie would probably be more…a work in progress

…evolving every day…you know, seeing myself one way, but life experiences make you

move mentally, emotionally, physically…and even career-wise in other directions, Deric

Angelettie the human being is a sacrificial person…meaning… if I got it, you got

it…You know, spread love is the Brooklyn way, type of mentality…

4.2   Overview of Themes

Through the application of values coding, which considers each data point and identifies

it as either a value, belief, or an attitude, I detected a similar pattern of thought between the

participants that informed a common progression of consciousness, regarding the manner in

which they processed and co-created their experience within these structures. Viewing their

processing of the terrain through a lens focused on values, beliefs and attitudes, revealed, not

only an overlap in *how* they experienced these structures (artists and students) but there seemed

to be a temporal symmetry in how their consciousness shifted as they navigated the terrain of the

music industry or the classroom. Put differently, the data shows that the participants shared

common personal/local experiences but within a very similar macro experience that features four

progressively distinct phases of thought and action over time. It is within this broader,

longitudinal, common macro-experience (elucidated by the values coding cycle i.e. their values,

beliefs and attitudes) that the flow and complexity of what can be understood as a black cultural

acclimation process exists and can be readily gleaned. The four phases that emerged as axial

themes are as follows:

PHASE 1
(*I'LL FIGURE IT OUT PHASE*) TRIAL AND ERROR AS A PRE-STRATEGY/INITIAL
NAVIGATION COMPASS.

PHASE 2
(*PEEP GAME PHASE*) GAIN NEW EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE--INTRODUCED TO
STRUCTURE'S PRODUCT/CAPITAL CENTRIC EMPHASIS

PHASE 3
(*NEW ATTITUDE PHASE*) USE NEW BELIEFS, VALUES AND ATTITUDES TO FUEL THE CALIBRATION/READJUSTMENT OF EXPECTATIONS (VALUES), BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

PHASE 4
(*EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER PHASE*) REIMAGINE EXPERIENCE AS A COMING OF AGE, LIFE LESSON LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

FIGURE 4.1 FOUR PHASE ACCLIMATION PROCESS

1.“I'll Figure It Out Phase” (Trial and Error as a Pre-Strategy).

This phase occurs prior to the artist entering the industry or before the student enters the high school classroom. It features a largely trial and error approach since there has been no insider experience at this point. Thus, values and attitudes are displayed here more than any concretized beliefs. "Let's see what this is and figure out what works" is a way to sum up the attitude underlying their approach.

Many of the values and attitudes that characterize this Trial and Error phase were only able to be observed through reactions to conflicts that characterize the later 2nd and 3rd phases. In these phases, expressions of conflict/dissatisfaction toward the new reality, revealed some of the participant's original, implicit expectations and assumptions of what should automatically be valued by the structure. There are two notable features of the "Trial and Error Phase." One is the participant's cautiously optimistic approach, where they just want the experience to be peaceful and not adversarial. The second is their strong expectation of having and being able to maintain the right to fulfill the promise of who they *imagined themselves to be,* prior to entering their respective structures.

2. ***"Peep Game Phase" (New Experiential Knowledge Gained).***

The "Peep Game" phase is an aspect of the participants' navigational experience that features a new and deeper understanding of what is valued by the structure. The emphasis placed by both structures on a product-driven/capital-centric culture, begins to become more apparent, eclipsing the person/artist-centric, pre-structure expectations of the participant. There is an "Oh I see how it works now" awareness as new beliefs, values and attitudes are formed about the structure's identity, character and function. In this phase, expectations of significant value being placed on "artist-centric"/cultural based notions of self-identity are challenged by the structure. These expectations may even be negated by the reality that individual/creative expression is only valued in so far as it successfully identifies with and conforms to the seemingly *acultural* logics of business.

3. ***"New Attitude Phase" (New Knowledge Fuels Necessary Calibration of Original***
Expectations to Structural Reality)

In the "New Attitude Phase, "the participant uses newly acquired knowledge fuel their calibration/readjustment of former value based expectations, beliefs, and attitudes to better navigate label's and classroom's product centric/non-personal reality. In this phase, the participants' actions become power negotiations with structure, in attempt to fulfill some semblance of their prior expectations in the face of the product centric focus of their respective structures. Thus, this phase is characterized by the clash points that arise between the participants' personal values and corporate interests. For the participants in this phase, import is now placed exclusively on sustainability/survival rather than cultural authenticity and fame/standing out—on becoming who they "need" to be instead of who they may have once dreamed of being.

4. "Experience Is the Best Teacher Phase" (Re-imagining success/the original purpose of the experience, as being primarily one of Learning how to survive vs reaching full potential).

This phase is characterized by the participants' reimagining of their experience as a life-learning experience. Good and bad experiences are taken as a whole and valued as a rite of passage, where they gained valuable understandings that can be applied to life outside of their respective structures, going forward. The take away for participants in this phase: "You have to play the role to some degree to survive in these cultures (music business and school), where the logics of money and predictability/uniformity, matter." The winner is the one who lasts/survives over time—the one who can bend without breaking.

Akil

Phase 1--(I'll Figure It Out Phase) Trial and Error as a Pre-Strategy

Akil's experience navigating the power dynamic of a major label (Interscope Records) in the music business began the moment he signed his contract. Prior to signing, his understanding of the inner workings of the label and its accompanying value system was not developed. I recognized that much of Akil's value system, prior to signing, was readily apparent as he spoke to his dissatisfaction of other events and situations while signed. These moments of dissatisfaction with structure, post signing, elucidated core values and attitudes consistent with what his original expectations were of the label, prior to signing. Thus, most of the values and attitudes reflected by Akil and the other artists in this chapter, are tantamount to their expressed unfulfilled expectations of the label.

As an artist, Akil's humanity based outlook facilitated an initial approach that was open minded to input from others (i.e. willingness to be a team player). Evidence of an original expectation by Akil, to essentially be valued and respected as an authentic, urban Hip Hop MC,

and not be categorized and marketed as "alternative rap" to white audiences, is apparent in the disappointment he expressed while recalling the following experience:

…We always had tour support so it never really was a bearing on us…to where it was like we need this because I mean, we…I, more so…I guess I wanted more validation just to secure my art! To reaching amongst other black people—just black people! And other artists and not be listed as "alternative." Yea man…I tried to counteract—counter it, by going about meeting who I got to meet on my own…radio hosts…personalities... and when I did go and meet with certain people they was like man, ya'll niggas is cool— cooler than what we was told…that's how I know it was like—motherfuckas is straight talking about us…man…you don't even know me! —So, I'm worrying about it…over exemplifying my blackness…

Akil, as a family man with a wife and children, approached the industry with hopes of Improving life quality of family and friends. He recalls a meeting where the label A&R accused him of not wanting to make money because he refused to buy in to the notion that to be more commercially viable he needed to make "black" music (i.e. mysogenistic, strip club-esque, trap music):

Going back to what I was saying like...he had to go tell what was going "down in the basement" right. So now the boss upstairs is like what they doing down in the basement? Go down and check and go see. When he come back and give a report, he not connected to it. He like, these kids, they just want to do hip hop. You know, they don't want to sell records...they…He was like, they not trying to sell records…To me, I got five children, so I'm definitely trying to sell some records!! And make some money…

In the following excerpt, Akil's desire to just be signed without worrying about what that entailed, highlights Akil's trial and error attitude along with his willingness to face industry related ups and downs, despite not being experienced enough yet to know when and how they would manifest:

> I had my ups and downs about it …the upside is just always wanting to be signed to a label—you know…wanting to have that experience…of being signed to the label, but the down side would be not receiving all of the perks of being signed.

There are many potential perks available to artists when signed to a label. One of the most fundamental is the number of videos a label is willing to bankroll. Although video budgets are recoupable, labels subjectively decide whether or not an artist is worth the initial front money it takes to shoot a video as well as the promotional dollars that accompany the release of a single. Aside from the multiple video releases on their first album, when they enjoyed the political clout afforded them by their manager Tom Walley, who was a respected business associate of Iovine, CEO of Interscope Records, the label only released one single from each of their two remaining albums. Limited video/single releases, especially during the time of Akil's tenure on Interscope inevitably lead to limited sales and loss of prestige due to lack of exposure.

Phase 2--(Peep Game Phase)-Gain New Experiential Knowledge

One of the ways in which Akil spoke to an awareness of power was in terms of his ability to control label generated narratives with respect to his identity. Akil had a white manager (Tom Walley) who was a power player at Interscope. Most of the label interaction, regarding the group, was done through Tom Walley, without the group being present. This narrative ultimately resulted in somewhat of a loss of identity for Jurasssic 5. By association with Walley and by him serving as a proxy for the group in direct conversations with the label upon signing, they were

easily re-identified as alternative, which disconnected them from their original cultural base. When asked what the best-case scenario would have been upon being signed with Interscope he was quick to share, exclaiming "More…more presence at the label…"

In Akil's situation at Interscope, when he *was* present at the label, he was in constant conflict with the label executives around compromising his identity and self-expression, as an artist. The following picture is a metaphor for Akil's burgeoning awareness of the manner in which power and authority shows up as a counterforce, when it comes to true self-expression that challenges the status quo. It is a picture from Akil's sound world expressing the lack of *tolerance*, regarding his freedom to critically speak out against power, whether it be the label or society in general, without incurring career ending pushback:

"And they try to paint us into…this picture…and you know you got this rope around our neck…You can't speak out!"

FIGURE 4.2 CANT SPEAK

As the culture of the label began to reveal itself, Akil was able to see that the power was in favor of the label executives. The label's monetary conscious modus operando called for an

adjustment, on Akil's behalf, in terms of preparation required to acquire the leverage needed to maintain momentum within the label. This burgeoning awareness also allowed Akil to see how important it is to develop a cogent strategy *prior* to signing.

Will I Am of the Grammy Award winning Black Eyed Peas, as a confidant and Interscope label mate of Akil, advised him to strategically include, rather than exclude the label as much as possible in order to maximize chances of success. Such advice prompted Akil to reach out to their estranged label president Jimmy Iovine to arrange a face to face meeting when the opportunity presented itself, so they could express their willingness to be more amenable to the label's creative input. Inclusion, as a tactic, was not something committed to by design prior to signing to the label. Akil was made aware of such a tactic in mid crisis, when it may have already been too late. He recounts the experience with Will I Am that opened his eyes to the need to move strategically and inclusively:

> Will I Am told me…sometimes you got to make the label feel a part of your project …a lot of times we as underground artists…we just like, you know…want to keep our shit to ourselves …He was like man, just make them feel like they a part of it… He pulled them into it and what not…So we knew this part going in to it, but my man never apologized…

Akil's goal of finally securing a meeting with Iovine was achieved. However, without a plan of action that included concrete objectives and potential ways in which they could be achieved, they went into a meeting with Iovine, who had avoided them for three years and had already began to execute his *own* agenda to push them into an "alternative" hip hop direction, years prior to the meeting. Although the meeting would yield a guarantee that their project was going to be taken off the shelf and released, with no plan of their own in place, nothing was done

to alter the creative direction Iovine had already imposed. As a result, Akil's group would remain labeled as alternative hip hop artists, going forward.

Along with Akil's observation that the culture of the industry is more about business talk than small talk, was his awareness that friends are irrelevant in the music industry. He describes the shock of encountering a Black male executive in a meeting at the label whom he perceived as being condescending and insulting towards him, expressing unprovoked disdain for Akil's self-image as a "Real" Hip Hop emcee. Consequently, Akil formed the belief that an executive with a Black face is not necessarily rooted in the culture and, more often than not, is adversarial, rather than friendly:

> …So, I went up there to go meet him… and the first thing he said to me…he told me-- "make Black music…" I was like yo!---Did you just say that?! He was like—ya'll got to get back to---then he put on some like…down south like…you know…bounce music like…he was like ya'll need to come out with the---just do this—went through the whole buffoon shit and all that—and I'm like…I'm lookin at dude basically like, what the fuck?!! Are you fucking serious?!

Akil's group was known as live/performance based "hip hoppers." They concentrated on precision choreography that included the original "b-boy" elements of hip hop originated by Black and Latino youth from the Bronx. Their stage show was dynamic, featuring witty lyricism and strong punchlines, call and response chorus techniques for crowd participation purposes, as well as highly skilled breakdancing. They practiced an original, underground form of hip hop, well known to hip hop aficionados, before hip hop became commercially viable. The label executive dismissed such authenticity by characterizing their iteration of hip hop as *non-black*. He then lauded the new, chant driven, more hyperbolic, less lyrical hip hop emerging from the

South at the time, as being not only superior to their hip hop aesthetic, but "blacker." He "dissed" them.

In a similar situation, at MCA, I had a Peep Game moment. My group (Shai) and I teamed up with a fresh new rapper from New York city at the time named Jay-Z and made a record called "Tonight". We did this independently of the label, in terms of resources, and it became the number one song in New York (the top market in the country) on Hot 97, the most popular urban station in the country. It was number one for four weeks on the station's nightly countdown called the "Hot Eight at 8." With such an unexpected organic mainstream acceptance of the underground collaboration between R and B and Hip-Hop artists, we requested a meeting with the Head of the Black music department at the time (Dave Harrelston) to discuss promotion money, particularly a budget for a video to sustain the momentum of the song's popularity in real time, through a visual representation in the market place.

However, once behind closed doors, it became clear as exhibited by his uptight demeanor and other social cues, that he was not a hip hop oriented person. As such, he didn't see the value in funding such a collaboration, especially since he didn't initiate it from the beginning. He also lacked the "street cred" and ties in the hip hop world to do an adequate job in strategically allocating resources to "blow the song up", despite the momentum it had already gained. Rather than admit all of this, not realizing we did research on him, he instead postured himself as an underground hip hop aficionado who needed to convince us ("the R and B guys"), the same ones that set up, funded and performed the song with Jay Z and Marley Marl (multiple grammy award winning producer), that our song was a smash and that we needed to realize that.

> *Here we are, platinum selling artists, products of an HBCU, well connected in the "hoods" of LA and NYC, with ties to movers and shakers in the Hip Hop world on both coasts, being talked to by a disconnected black executive as if we were the ones that weren't urban enough to know what we had created. My take away was the same as Akil's; A Black executive is not necessarily rooted in the culture and will, more often than not, tend to play the role of an extreme gatekeeper. In other words, he will reject ideas that he didn't create and won't receive credit for, even at the expense of the profit-making potential. Hence, a song that organically became the number one Hip Hop/R and B song for 8 weeks in the most competitive market in America, never received a video budget and remained largely a New York underground hit instead of the international smash it could have been.*

Other encounters led Akil to believe that there are no friends in the music business, only business associates looking out for their best interests. With the group's project being held up for 3 years' time, due to the label's benign neglect, a meeting was finally forthcoming, due to *leverage* possessed by the group's manager:

> Coming around to the third album…so we tried to get a meeting with Jimmy Iovine…it takes us like three years…Basically couldn't even get a meeting…only reason why we got a meeting with him was because my manager ended up managing Damien Marley at the time that they had put out that *Welcome to Jamrock*… Jimmy Iovine—he trying to get at Damien…so now he got to go through my manager now… So that's what prompted him to have a conversation with us at Interscope.

Akil, in the following account, sheds light on the manner in which labels tend to impose *their* version of what is the most marketable packaging/strategy (i.e. look, sound, target market

etc.). The following *peep game* moment revealed to Akil, that the label will proceed with their vision, regardless, even while they feign a spirit of compromise and common ground. Here I quote Akil at length as he speaks in detail of such an experience:

…"We're still going to put it out" …but so he telling us like "if you want to work with us, try to…"so, you know we like, yo well, so you have some other producers we can work with and stuff?…I know ya'll work with…Just Blaze and …Timberland…and you know Pharell…and you know…Scott Storch and different people, so we like… can we get a list of these people and you know, try to—cause he heard our music, but he didn't hear a single, basically… he heard that Dave Matthews cut – "Lets Work It Out" song, but he was like "yo that's tight but that's not the single" …still looking for a… basically…a single…but *not,* right. So…long story short…we ended up working with Scott Storch. Yea, went out to Miami and recorded with him. The song came out pretty cool, but that's not what ended up being the single…what ended up being the single was the song that he had said *wasn't* our first single---which was the Dave Matthews song…So basically, they just pushed us into alternative radio---not even alternative radio…they fucked up and tried to send it to everybody …when it was an alternative song…it wasn't even…like a hardcore true hip hop underground fan, song… So…yea…it hurt us…

At this point, with the label selecting the least authentic, most appealing crossover song on the album as the single, it became clear to Akil that creating and marketing the product are two different things. Accompanying such an observation is his belief that once allowed to dictate the value, the label reserves the right to project onto the artist, the image and qualities they perceive to be the most viable, per their interests. Akil now understood that such a process,

which begins the moment an artist pursues signing to a label, can render an artist inauthentic and without identity, if not aware.

Phase 3--(New Attitude Phase)—Application of New Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

A need to shore up communication reared its head when Tom Walley, an insider at Interscope, was no longer their manager and they no longer had an inside presence to deal directly with Iovine regarding their project. As Akil put it, "We ended up coming under Jimmy Iovine…we didn't ever have no direct connection to him." Akil took matters into his own hands. His proactivity was a result of his "peep game" perception that the label allocates resources to projects the way they see fit, according to their vision and market place logics, often times in spite of what the artist thinks. Jurassic 5 was being marketed by Iovine to *alternative rap* markets despite Akil's identification with urban hip hop, which hurt Akil's ability to be credible as a person as well as an artist, in the very urban settings where he came of age as a young man (South Central LA).

He responded by personally supplementing the labels inability to connect with black radio on the group's behalf. Using his own urban radio connections, his way of navigating the perceived oversight was to play the role of a label representative on behalf of his groups best interests and meet directly with the number one urban radio station in the Los Angeles market, 92.3, one of the most impactful markets in the nation:

> Yea! So, I ended up going up to 92.3 the beat—so I—it wasn't by way of the label, it was just about me having a connection up there …So I went up there and I got our single played! Right …just out of love. So, I went to the…I went back up to Interscope after I left and I was like yo! Did you hear me on the radio?!...So all his workers and stuff, they had heard me up there. So they was like, yea, yea! And they was like yo!!-- So when he

came up there, he was like--they was like…Yo, did you hear they song playing on the radio last night? So he like, "Well…well its one thing to play it, they gotta keep playing it." I said that's *yo* fuckin job, right there! I said I already did yo fucking job right now! I did half yo work!…now *you* gotta… that's on *you*…that's on *you*, now---know what im saying!!

"Sometimes you have to realize what you're dealing with, suck it up and keep moving forward" is the attitude Akil begins to employ, despite the conflicts and disappointing outcomes, as he became more concerned with longevity and sustainability. In the following experience expressed in Akil's own words, he references the meeting mentioned above, where he managed to get their single played on 92.3 the Beat and the head of the Black Music department reacted dismissively to his successful efforts. He recalls, "I left out the office. I was distraught, but it let me know how the road was going to be from that point on. I was like, 'Oh we fucked right now.' We just gotta keep it moving and doing what we doing." However, based on his experiences at the label, he believed that the Black label executives' lack of empathy ("Hatin'") in matters of business with black artists, was indeed racially motivated, in a manner similar to Black on Black crime. He expresses this belief, while comparing the dynamics to those that existed in slavery between those Blacks that lived in the master's house and those that worked in the field:

…Black people lynch Black people…That Black guy at the label, Kevin Black…Its ironic…he basically tried to lynch us…But you know, we didn't get that energy directly from "massa," even though he has the final say so…It came from the negro …the Uncle Tom—they went back and told the master…look at these niggas trying to run away, we ought to lynch this nigga…Cut they foot off…cripple they ass…

Phase 4--(Experience Is the Best Teacher) --Reimagine the Experience as a Coming of Age, Life Lesson Learning Opportunity

Akil embodies "making it through," now utilizing the wisdom from his label experiences enough to enact them in real life scenarios. He speaks to having the strength to *hold on* as one of his "strengths," even after the label experience when he articulates, "Yea I'm for real…I'm still like that man… I'm like …I guess that's part of me…I just hold on...I'm dealing with something right now…it's a trip that you interviewing me in this moment." When I asked Akil to come up with *one* word that captured his overall experience, he chose *resilient*, explaining that, "Just, I think…just Black people period…are just resilient people…just being knocked down and just faced with every day… you know, it's always some shit!"

In line with Akil perceiving his ability to survive the industry as being a victory within itself, when asked what song would he use as a metaphor for the essence of his experience in the industry, Akil replied "We Gone Be Alright, that Kendrick Lamar joint." This song by one of the most lyrically advanced hip hop emcees of this era, Kendrick Lamar very forcefully and dramatically paints a seething portrait of those who abuse power in the name of exercising authority. The song likens Lamar's desire to escape and run from the clutches of such societally imposed authority and its attending need to control, to a soul literally trying to escape the clutches of satan. In the end, Lamar offers comfort exclaiming that "as long as God got us, we gone be alright."

"The good comes with the bad" sums up Akil's attitude as he became more accustomed to the up and down nature of the industry. *Making it through* and *surviving* are now his ultimate objectives to be fulfilled while signed. Akil expresses his acceptance of the fact that good as well

as bad moments defined his experience, acknowledging, "I had my ups and downs about it and stuff."

Further exemplifying the notion that surviving the trials of the industry becomes the default goal, is Akil's emphasis on the scariness/mysteriousness of the industry. When asked for a sound that metaphorically speaks to his industry experience Akil ponders, "Uh…like those scary movie sounds (performs the sound) …it's scary and you don't know what's finna happen…that sound like you know something is finna happen but you don't know what is going to happen."

Tracy Lee

Phase 1--(I'll Figure It Out Phase) Trial and Error as a Pre-Strategy

The following recollection by Lee establishes that as a new artist, he fully valued having creative sovereignty and expected to be unencumbered as a *hired creator*, possessing the freedom (autonomy and creative control) to be the "artist" they signed:

> You'd really have to give me a lot of autonomy right now for me to sign with a label…so in that particular case, if I'm signed to a label, then that means I got autonomy…so therefore, that record will see the light of day…Well you know what—let me retract…not retract but…when you have autonomy…that pretty much covers everything …when you have that ability to have that *final* say-so…that pretty much covers any and everything except for the money aspect of it.

Lee's above statements are also illustrative of a person who expected to have the right to simply fulfill the promise of who he imagines himself to be while within the industry. Thus, going into the industry, Lee had no reason to believe his sovereignty as an artist would be encroached upon, hence the non-possession of any personal, pre-label plan, that would include

safeguarding against this as a consideration. His uninformed approach was largely one of *trial and error.* In Lee's early experience, he already placed value on preserving his soul/cultural identity while navigating the music business. With such a mind state that, upon entering the industry, identified with his ability to focus on developing his art *above* other considerations, the reality of the industry's emphasis on *product* over *art* was not yet fully apparent to Lee and would not be sufficiently planned for, if at all.

Lee speaks, in hindsight, to operating under the assumption at the time, that he had the ability/luxury to focus purely on art and realizing over time that other elements unbeknownst to him at the time, impacted that freedom. Lee also expresses his lack of plan and knowledge, pointing out, "With the proper legal guidance and with the proper management, then that frees you up to be the artist you want to be…as opposed to my position back then…because I'm learning on the fly."

"We can make it on trial and error," is the very sentiment he reflects as he recalls, "I learned a whole lot, especially from the business side…cause I went into it blindly…not really giving a damn about the business." However, before Lee signed a deal, he embraced the probability that the good would come with the bad in his overall experience. This pre-label attitude set the tone for Lee's navigation in that it facilitated a *bend but don't break* habit of mind. Lee's optimistic but realistic approach spawned from the understanding that the good comes with the bad is exhibited in the following recollection: "I wanna make it work, but deep down in my…I knew that wasn't it…that wasn't the record! You know…I don't care what anybody says man…art is…you can't put no label on art." For Lee, this "Bend don't break" habit of mind/attitude being already developed, facilitated the ability/sensibility to "bounce back" from future set-backs and survive challenges that arose due to not having a plan.

Phase 2--(Peep Game Phase)-Gain New Experiential Knowledge

As movement through the industry provided Lee with more experience, he further embraced a tendency to place more value on possessing power/control. Lee began to sense that he didn't have the ultimate control over his artistry. He spoke to a moment of understanding, realizing he had been victimized by a type of power abuse called conflict of interest:

> …hiring people that, ok…conflict is basically the root word of what I'm about to tell you…there's a conflict of interest when you have somebody that's your manager but at the same time, I guess when your manager is also your producer…which is also your executive producer…nah…that's not the way you do proper business…These are separate entities! But again…this is a situation of me *not understanding* and being educated back then enough to understand that you *must* separate and differentiate the products, hence conflict…

In matters of management and other team matters, Lee's new-found understandings around control began to focus on, what can be characterized as, its delivery system—*the contract.* Lee, as he became more seasoned, was able to see that the contract was more than a formality, but a literal codified and agreed upon power arrangement, most often favoring the label. When asked about the *significance* of the contract, when it comes to being an artist at a label, Lee is quick to explain:

> …Because you're not going to get into any business venture without a contract…you're not going to have it…Yes indeed…Who has *delivery?*!…who has *control*!? So, its black and white, in your face!

A. **TERM.** The effectiveness of this Agreement shall commence with its execution by all of the parties, and shall continue thereafter for a period of _____ (#) years.

B. **PRODUCTION OF RECORDING.** The Recording shall be produced in the following manner:

1. **PRODUCTION.** Company agrees to produce one master recording consisting of songs written and performed by Artist (hereinafter referred to as the "Songs". The resulting recording (hereinafter referred to as the "Recording") shall include music of not less than forty (40) minutes in playing duration, and shall be of a quality which is equal to master recordings normally produced for commercial distribution.

2. **CONTRIBUTION BY ARTIST.** Artist agrees to full cooperate with the Company, in good faith, in the production of the Recording; to contribute to such production the music and lyrics embodied in the Songs; to arrange, direct and perform the Songs in such a manner as to facilitate the production of the Recording; and to otherwise strictly observe the remaining duties and obligations of this Agreement.

3. **COSTS.** Company shall be responsible for all costs incurred in the production of the Recording, including the prepayment of all travel, hotel and meal costs incurred by Artist in attending the recording sessions referenced in Section B.5 herein. Company may recover such receipted expenses pursuant to the production of master recordings or the advancement of the Artist's career. Company's production, promotion, manufacturing and all other bonafide expenses relating to Artist are deemed recoupable from gross income.

4. **ARTISTIC CONTROL.** Company and Artist shall be jointly responsible for all

FIGURE 4.3 CONTRACT

As the political reality of the label experience became clearer to Lee, the idea that a plan needed to be formulated and implemented, going forward, became more urgent. However, this realization in Lee's case, speaks to a particular understanding of the best-case scenario. He speaks as one who learned these lessons the hard way:

> …you would also have somebody on your team… i.e. a lawyer that understands, as well as you, as an artist having a working knowledge of how the system in the business works…so that there's some checks and balances, not only with the people you're negotiating with, but also even your own attorney! Cause your attorney might present something to you that if you had a working knowledge of how it works, you may say ok…I hear you, but that doesn't work for me…so why don't we try it this way…you know what I'm saying…

For Lee, based on the knowledge gained from "peeping game," a fundamental aspect of being prepared for the industry is understanding the need to separate friendships from business associations:

…Certain situations led to conflict…ok…one in particular…and this goes back to convoluting your friendships with the business aspect of it. Conflict that arose is when I did the song with BIG…you know Mark is…Mark Pitts is BIG's manager, so you know naturally I figured it would happen, but actually it was---so that's done…BIG is signed to Bad Boy…and here comes the business aspects of it…that I'm naïve…Once we get into the studio and BIG does the record— we do the record…now it's a matter of now the record is done, oh were outta here! Forgetting about this little caveat that people still may not hear the record unless they actually go buy the album! Why…because we weren't afforded the sticker rights—we weren't able to advertise that BIG is actually on the record.

Phase 3--(New Attitude Phase)—Application of New Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

By "peeping game" and recognizing the degree to which he was uninformed about the business aspect of the industry, Lee became highly motivated to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the music industry. This understanding would lay the foundation for a more informed, strategic approach going forward. For Lee, this was the industry setback that played a key role in him becoming an entertainment attorney later in life. As a result of the disappointing Biggie experience, Lee strongly embraced of the notion that friends are irrelevant:

…at business…get what I'm saying…you can truly be a friend outside of the business, but do not convolute it and mix the two when it comes to the business…once the

paperwork is on the table…put the friend stuff to the side period…Now we're just

business associates.

Due to the competitive aspect of the industry, marketing is a specialized field that is out

of the purview of the artist, in many cases. A label's marketing strategy can often minimize

cultural identity, due to the non-consideration of culture in their bottom line business equations.

In Lee's words, "They don't have an understanding. That's my point! They don't have an

understanding and I don't think they want to understand. Their whole thing is about numbers.

It's a numbers game with them. Are we selling records or aren't we selling records?"

As applied to Lee's artistry, the label chose to market and promote his songs in a

different order than Lee intended. His album concept "Many Faces" required that certain songs

be released in a specific order, so that the album concept, which in this case was Lee's identity

(*The Many Faces of Tracy Lee)* could be clearly understood. Not only did this justify Lee's

belief, that the label owned and operated the product the way they saw fit, but it also allowed him

to see his true *value* to the label, as an *artist*. His account is as follows:

> They want to put me in a box…they want to label me…you see what I'm
>
> saying…therefore again!... it goes back to the artistic expression cause they---you
>
> dropped the ball on presentation…so now people don't even know what they getting
>
> themselves into when they pick up an album, hear me in a interview…when they see me
>
> in person they don't know what they ---they don't know nothing...but "The
>
> Theme"…and he has an album with a lot of personalities—which…you know…several
>
> people have done…and the fans get it…so…get the fuck outta here.

Understanding why things are done from the source, instead of blindly navigating,

emphasizes and informs a more strategic movement by Lee. At this point, he understood the

importance of being involved in the loop of the decision-making process. In Lee's case, a

conflict arose from his inability to know specifically *why* the song he performed with Biggie

couldn't be promoted with the release of his album. Lee exclaims as he recalls his reaction:

> Why can't we go to Puff and ask him to get clearance to be able to advertise for this
>
> particular record!?...Never happened…so then I'm wondering why isn't this
>
> happening…I know Mark…I know Puff…I've known him before we got into this
>
> game—why isn't this happening?! Conflict!! Me mixing business with friendship.

"If it aint one thing it's another, kid/when it rains it pours, I did/
what I had to do, was run for cover and/think quick."
                    (*T. Lee on pursuing his dream of being a professional MC*)

Forward movement, was a most important consideration for Lee as an artist. Beyond

direct compromise, where both parties *mutually* give up something in order to achieve an equally

agreed upon arrangement, Lee projects the attitude that "sometimes you just gotta suck it up and

move forward. Lee shares:

> I think it was more or less…you're a novice…you don't know what you're talking
>
> about—you haven't been in this game long enough…we've seen things come and
>
> go…whether it be hip hop, r and b, pop, rock, soul…what have you---you just don't
>
> know enough…you don't have the experience…plus!! You don't know the people I
>
> know. You can tell—it's that button---that's essentially what it is---you don't know what
>
> buttons I can push…you don't know who I have an influence on, you don't know who I
>
> can lean on…therefore you are in the dark when it comes to this.   Just make the records
>
> and we'll decide if it….

A similar incident occurred to my group, Shai. I was in charge of the image aspect of our group (i.e. album artwork, model selection for videos). I would interface with the label (MCA) regarding things concerning our image and would also be allowed to give creative input to the label while they went through their image making process. On one occasion leading up to our third release, "Blackface," I had been chosen on behalf of the group to discuss our art work design plans with the head of the album artwork department. Since Shai is an ancient Egyptian concept from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, meaning destiny personified, we wanted to project more of an Egyptian motif. Our plan was to illustrate our album cover with the principal group members being adorned in pharaonic garb and carved in the stone as living hieroglyphics.

There would be spaces where the stone had seemingly chipped away, revealing parts of our actual flesh, showing that we were the living personification of the ancient Egyptian, destiny concept. Emerging from the floor inside the cave where the living hieroglyphs were, was to be a torch placed directly between the four of our faces, illuminating our features and pharaonic headgear, etc. As the artwork was nearing completion, having already been approved twice as it was progressing and as the album release date became very close at hand, the label inexplicably ordered the head of the art department to stop working on our album cover as currently constructed. There was no explanation other than, they "decided not to use it." Our cultural affinity to Egypt as the land of our ancestors, and the desire to represent the Ancient Egyptian legacy contained within our namesake was rendered irrelevant, ignored and without our consent or regard for it, replaced with a more traditional rendering of our

likenesses.

FIGURE 4.4 BLACKFACE ALBUM COVER (SHAI)

This realization that the label "owns all the cards," as put by Lee, facilitates a belief that

"being" on a label is tantamount to engaging in a constant negotiation for control over self-

identity and resources. The microphone, as a direct means to galvanize support from the fan

base, is a way to circumvent some of the leverage of the label, forcing them to compromise and

acquiesce to the vision of the artist. The "mic" is extremely valuable to Lee as an equalizer, of

sorts. When asked to provide a picture as a metaphor for his journey as a signed artist, Lee

offered a picture of a contract and a microphone. He details what the microphone can do for an

artist in terms of leveraging power:

…you can pretty much write your own check, depending on how many people gravitate towards you…it basically tells you how much leverage that you have, with regards to the record label…more people to get behind you, the more records you sell…the less people to get behind you and what you're saying, via the microphone, then the less leverage that you may have when it comes to somebody just putting up finances…in a business venture…

FIGURE 4.5 THE MIC

Phase 4--(Experience Is the Best Teacher) --Reimagine the Experience as a Coming of Age, Life Lesson Learning Opportunity

When asked to pick a *word* and a *color* to metaphorically exemplify his experience in the industry Lee chose the color Black, because in his words, "Black is strength! Black is who I am…Black is a beautiful color." Lee picks the word "strength" to compliment the color black, chosen to metaphorically represent his experience in the industry. In Lee's words:

…And that goes to the word strength …So you talking bout the *drum*, the color *Black* and the word *strength*…and those are the three things…not only…that I would like to think, that make up my persona, but also in the music business and in the music industry and me dealing with music period. Those are the three symbols, if you will, that allowed me to move in the direction or create the foundation for myself as an artist…for myself as a person…for myself as a man…and all of the above.

As Lee became able to reimagine his industry experience as a business/life aptitude enricher, his focus began to shift, valuing intangible elements related to character, identity and personal maturity more so than before, in his experience:

I'm grateful…I'm grateful for everything—all the trials and tribulations in my life—all of

the struggles...all of the—now…you brought me to this point, that I'm just

grateful…because as I look around and I look at my surroundings and I look at my

family…and I look at you know, my friends and like…I really don't know anybody

that lives a better life than me…

> *it's like a breath of fresh air/it's like hopping out the new S coup with fresh gear/It's like the power of prayer/it's like the sound of the kick panned with the right snare/it's like I'm not even here/trying to describe how I feel right now—it's like yea! /I am on a cloud and I aint got a care/it's like I got the air of an heir of a billionaire! --T.Lee Excerpt from "So Grateful"*

Embracing the notion that "The good comes with the bad," early on in the experience,

positively impacted Lee's ability to process the unfavorable outcomes incurred during his tenure

as a signed artist and maintain forward movement. Lee espoused the particular belief that

knowledge of how the business works can be used to improve navigation through the industry as

well as life. For Lee, his inability to promote Biggie on his album with no explanation, as well as

his acceptance of relationships that were conflicts of interest, caused him to experience setbacks

as an artist. However, the internalization of the fact that it was essentially due to a lack of

knowing the business, drove Lee into the next phase of his life where, as a practicing

entertainment lawyer, his expertise now includes interpreting and negotiating contracts. Lee, in

the following excerpt, expresses how as an attorney, he is in a position to impact younger artists

who can benefit from his sensibilities and lessons learned. To that end, he expresses that he

wants to implement giving to each of his clients a *book* that can provide them with the advantage

he never had, by helping them understand the nuances of the contract *before* they sign:

…if you're smart you wouldn't get into any type of business venture without a

contract…but the contract itself…It doesn't just stop there…and that's why I, man, I also

wanted to implement a *book of some sorts* that teaches you about the business of

music…you know what I'm saying because if you don't have a working knowledge of

the business of music, then that contract that you're reading means nothing…

Deric Angelettie-(D-Dot)

Phase 1--(I'll Figure It Out Phase) Trial and Error as a Pre-Strategy

Being a person that self-defines as one who sacrifices for and shares with others, mutual

respect between those with whom he relates is a very important consideration and pre-label value

of Angelettie. He speaks to this need to be respected/valued as an authentic artistic authority as

echoed in the following account:

> So, when they called me up and asked me my thoughts…I tell them…ya'll gone have
>
> issues…and then sure enough, Mariah Carey hears the record and tells Fifty he gotta
>
> change some lines or else she gone stop the record…Cause the Mary J. Blige/Case line
>
> was really Tommy and Mariah!... Then…we have a big meeting and you know, Donny
>
> Ienner [Chairman of Colombia Records] says to everybody…you know, D Dot was the
>
> one that told us to fix all this way before we had issues with it…and I said…I stood up in
>
> the meeting and I said…yea! and I don't give a fuck who they are I'm talking like I'm
>
> talking to you right now…I'm like yea, if y'all just fuckin listen! You think I was just
>
> sitting in them rooms all day and just nodding my head yes to everything---Fuck that!!!
>
> Them albums wouldn't have been them albums if I aint stand up and say some shit.

The desire to improve life quality for friends and family was another value/expectation of

Angelettie going into the label experience. It served as his motivation to "succeed" and remain

open minded towards doing what works (trial and error) in order to maintain his standing in the

industry. This standard, and the level of respect it entails for "others" is a value system that

Angelettie would be expecting or at least trying to build, initially, in the label culture. Deric's

emphasis on *sacrifice* in the following excerpt is exemplified by his mother's impact on him

while in the industry, with respect to his general desire to reward her sacrifice by being a

success. Her sacrifice was so profound to him, that when asked to provide a picture that could

serve as a metaphor to sum up his experience as an artist, he produced a picture of he and his

mother. He also speaks to her import as a "go-to" advisor for how to best navigate the label,

based on his respect for her proven ability to remain clear during adversity:

"Sacrificed everything for me…So whenever I…whenever the music industry happened…and things happened in the business, the first person I think about is my mother! How she would handle it…how she would come to me and advise me."

FIGURE 4.6 D-DOT/MOM

Angelettie's sense of self-sacrifice also points to his sensibilities regarding his desire to see the,

"Betterment of all people.". Although Angelettie had a developed sense of empathy leading to a

desire to see all people having the freedom to better themselves, his sensibilities as a team player

were tested while in the industry. The following excerpt captures Angelettie critiquing his choice

to use a unilateral rather than a team approach which exhibits his understated sensibility to the efficacy of being a team player:

> One of the mistakes I made was wearing all of those hats simultaneously, as opposed to delegating those responsibilities to others…so one of the mistakes that I made…was wearing my artist/emotional hat…in my CEO meetings.

Expressly important to D-Dot, at this point, was the preservation of his soul/cultural identity over pursuing capital. This pre-label sensibility of Angelettie, that values and seeks to protect his soul/culture from what are perceived to be culturally insensitive industry forces can be gleaned from the following excerpt where D-Dot recalls:

> At the time, it was my opinion, the culture vulture syndrome that we go through…where, we are the culture, but we pass it off to people that we don't know…and they mix it with their agenda…and it comes out on the other side unclear to us…Right? Right, and things that they want to do that they feel will help make money…but it doesn't necessarily coincide with your *soul*.

> For Angelettie, at this point in his experience, the "We can make it on trial and error" attitude is a strong theme. As a human, Angelettie characterizes himself as "a work in progress," which by extension, also applies to D-Dot the artist, providing a pre-label basis for a willingness to progress in the industry through a process of trial and error, figuring things out as he gains experience. Without any experiential knowledge, Angelettie was still aware that there would be a combination of highs and some lows to navigate. It is this pre-label understanding that facilitated his bend but don't break approach to navigating the industry. D-Dot's cavalier recollection of the fact that his experience was riddled with ups and downs also highlights an already established

sensibility to the necessity of absorbing adversity (ups and downs) as a vital part of achieving his

goals. D-Dot expresses the roller coaster nature of his label experience:

> My overall experience as an artist was eye opening…dream fulfilling…a roller coaster
>
> ride…um…unfulfilling at the same time…didn't necessarily achieve all that I wanted to
>
> achieve in that dream…Right…Cause that dream took a left and a right, a up and a down
>
> and a curve and a u-turn and a slide and a slip, you know what I mean…

Phase 2--(Peep Game Phase)-Gain New Experiential Knowledge

Angelettie speaks to the realization that the power to "control your destiny" and create

the leverage to demand perks/comforts that aren't normally extended by the label as common

courtesy, lies in the ability of an artist to simply *uphold their end of the deal* by selling units:

> And that's the real…I'm speaking as if I'm them, like…listen D-Dot…you right…you
>
> that dude…fuck it, we'll…we'll comb your hair for you…you know, we'll give you a
>
> massage…If that's what you need…but at the end of the day, you walking in here with
>
> that joint yet?! All that ranting and raving, and all that cultural shit you talking, and all
>
> that, Hip Hop shit…where's the hits nigga!? Like that's…like really!! When you think
>
> about it, that's really why I'm there!

Deric especially valued the ability to speak candidly after "peeping" that expression is

usually done to the dictates of the label's subjectivity. The ability to speak out and be respected

as a source of authority was valuable to Angelettie because the ability to interact directly and

vocally with the label heads, may have influenced the decision- making process around his

cultural sensibilities, rather than their purely market logics. As D-Dot began to experience the

industry first hand, and began to witness how the label operates, the import of strategizing, *prior*

to meetings or engaging in contractual talks also became realized:

But in certain situations it aint but so many things that they could come at you with…so you try to get people around you that can help you figure those things out…you know its sorta like role playing…you know…or rehearsals…I think if a lot of my time in rehearsal was spent better, you know, for those types of situations…which kinda is a microcosm for the way we need to prepare for being artists…meaning we need to study our craft more…You know what I mean, if we studied a little bit more, then some of the things that came our way, we would be much more prepared for.

For Angelettie, one of the major considerations, with regard to strategically navigating the label's power elite, was the value in understanding how to discuss business *without* the conflict created by being emotionally overprotective of the culture. D-Dot reflects on having to learn this lesson as he states:

And that's the part I had to learn…that's in any business…not just in our business. We can't get emotional about our talent and our culture…there's certain aspects. If we partner up with people that are spending millions of dollars on us, and they're not getting it back--and we want them to understand it from a cultural perspective…and they're looking at it from a *negative* perspective…In the red or in the black perspective…which one *you* thinking about?

Parallel to the aforementioned value, concerning the artists ability to conduct business non-emotionally, is Angeletties attitude that, on no uncertain terms, characterizes "money conversations" as being really short. In Angelettie's own words:

…It boils down…G, in my world, our worlds, we can have opinions all day. We start talking mathematics, conversations become *really, really short*… by years…by

millennial years…by centuries…and it's simple mathematics…whoever cuts the check, is in power…

Based on experiences and interactions with the label that have proven to be devoid of friendship or personal affects , Angelettie developed the belief that friends are irrelevant in the music business. As Angelettie previously stated, "We start talking mathematics, conversations become really short." When asked about his realization and understanding of the notion that friends and the industry don't mix, D-Dot referred to his personal situation:

Um, semi! I had a semi team…which is another mistake I made…walking to those offices…a lot of people that were attached to me were emotionally attached to me. They saw me from nothing to now…from nothing matters…to me winning…

According to Angeletttie, these new experiences he acquired functioned like an alarm that snaps the artist out of the indifference mode underpinning the trial and error approach. Adding to that sentiment, D-Dot offered the sound of the starter pistol, as a metaphor for his music industry experience, stating that when you hear that sound it means, "Everybody pay attention! Stay woke!"

Having absorbed the understanding that the label is dominant in a monetary based relationship, D-Dot offers a glimpse into his take away from such experiences, in terms of what it takes going forward, to have the type of power and leverage that would command the respect of a label:

I got a brain in my head…I got to have a plan…I got to have a team…I got to have the want and desire to win!! And one of the most important things for any youth out there that's listening to this is… life is a big negotiation, and if you not prepared to walk away…"

Phase 3--(New Attitude Phase)—Application of New Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

Being a team player at this point became *more valued* as a strategic approach to navigation, for Angelettie. Earlier thoughts of maintaining absolute control by being the artist and CEO of his company and deciding against delegating responsibilities, subside and give way to the recognition of the value of a team.

> One of the mistakes I made was wearing all of those hats simultaneously, as opposed to delegating those responsibilities to others…

In an attempt to shore up some modicum of control over the fate of the "label owned" projects he created, D-dot began to target label flexibility as a characteristic he hoped to impact. Angelettie describes the challenges he faced in this regard, navigating the slow-moving culture of the major label (Arista), coming from Puffy's quicker moving, smaller subsidiary label "Bad Boy." He reflects:

> My fight was, I worked at one of the best situations that I thought I could be in at Bad Boy for years…and I'm trying to tell you guys how to be a luxury speedboat as a luxury ocean liner…that moves really slow while you want to keep up…in the meetings you want to keep up…with Puff and Jay and Jermaine and…Cash Money and Master P and all these you know, people…you want to keep up with them, but you don't want to move like…..

> *I experienced a similar situation at MCA with label inflexibility. We (Shai) did a record called Baby I'm Yours which rose to number 10 on the Billboard charts. The label wanted us to do a remix in order to sustain momentum. Instead of doing a traditional remix where we use the same vocals over a slightly different track, we created an entirely different version of the song called "Yours." It was acapella and sonically more soulful and urban than the*

original version of Baby I'm Yours. We created it in order to ride the wave and expand the pop success of Baby I'm Yours to include a more urban fan base. Instead of releasing them consecutively, they felt that the songs were so different that they would compete and cancel each other out. We argued that according to that same logic they would enhance each other instead of canceling each other.

We felt the remix only made sense if it was released on the heels of the original version, as a spark, to extend the life of the single. The label decided to put it on the next album which wasn't released until much later, effectively diluting its momentum in the marketplace. Another popular group actually released two different versions of their hit at the time which, instead of competing with each other, both placed in the top 5 on Billboard's Top !00 singles simultaneously. The label was stuck in their traditional ways and couldn't see that we were on the cutting edge of a remix trend which resulted in us not being able to maximize the impact of our style of remix.

At this point in his experience Angelettie began to look at conflict strictly in terms of it being a battle of agendas, conceding that in most cases, the label's agenda *is* the primary agenda. D-Dot speaks to his understanding that in head to head conflict with the label, he realizes that sometimes he may have to resign to losing, since he simply has less power than the label. D-Dot states, "It doesn't really coincide with your agenda…It doesn't always coincide with your staff or your dream…and so, you have those battles…those experiences we all experience…and it's not a white/black thing…it's a power/unpower thing."

D-Dot adds, that conflict usually prompts the label to exert their power and dominance, further exposing the artists power deficit. As an artist who responded emotionally to conflict, D-

Dot may have forfeited any potential favor or any strategically acquired social capital that would have resulted in the label being more receptive to his presence and ideas in a business context. Angelettie reflects:

> It was a conflict because, you know, it's really no emotions in those rooms…for one…Two…I was there to be a CEO, but I'm also the artist…So from a CEO perspective, the company that I was signed to, which was Columbia Records…They wanted me to think more like them…which sometimes conflicts with being an artist…and so, my mistake was, I went at the heads of the label.

After having been immersed in such a reality rife with conflict and compromise, D-Dot developed an attitude reflective of a deeper understanding that "negotiation," was the underlying reality behind all transactional occurrences between a label and artists. According to his new understanding, being on a label is, in itself, a constant negotiation based on anticipated responses and strategic compromise:

> So now…to address the conflict, I try to prepare more by, you know, troubleshooting all the pros and cons, before I make a decision…from both angles meaning…if I do this, what would their response be…If I want this what would their response be…if I ask for that, what would their response be…What's option A…what's option B…what's option C… What am I willing to compromise on…Am I willing to bend at all…or how far am I gonna bend…*am I gonna bend but don't break.*

Born and raised on the tough streets of Brooklyn, Derric has never been a stranger to standing up for himself when convicted to do so. Brooklynites, such as Deric, are also known for moving decisively and unhesitatingly to meet an important objective. In fact, when asked to represent his music industry experience with a song metaphor, Angelettie referenced "We Live

in Brooklyn Baby," By Roy Ayers, as if to imply that the urgent attitude and sharp survival skills needed to navigate growing up in Brooklyn are the kinds of skills that come in handy when navigating a label as a signed artist:

> ***We live in Brooklyn baby. We can make it baby. Our time is now!*** *–Roy Ayers*

> If you believe in something you got to go hard! But…there's consequences to that!! And so, you got to be willing, like I said…if you sit down at a negotiation table, you gotta be willing to get up…So…if you gonna *have* those rants…you gonna *have* the tirades…I gotta be prepared for the consequences that came my way…

Phase 4--(Experience Is the Best Teacher) --Reimagine the Experience as a Coming of Age, Life Lesson Learning Opportunity

Now that his strategies have been vetted and recalibrated to navigate the power of the label in a more comprehensive manner, a new emphasis and value is placed on having experienced the good and the bad of the industry while being able to claim, "I made it through the trials." The perceived success of the bend but don't break/survival mechanism employed by the Angelettie undergirds a belief that the industry served as somewhat of a rite of passage. At this point, the focus largely shifts from expending maximum energy in hopes of making large waves, to persevering and making it steadily through the experience, despite the trials associated with going through "ups and downs." D-Dot speaks to being able to experience the good and the bad of the industry very frankly, characterizing his overall experience and resultant value system as the foundation of the worldview he employs, to navigate life beyond music. Angelettie reflects:

> I probably wouldn't trade it for the world, cause once again, being a work in progress…where I am today… those experiences helped build the house that I'm living

in now…and I'm talking about, not necessarily the physical house…I'm talking about

like, the world that I'm living in.

A more profound internalization of the notion that the good comes with the bad is

expressed as an attitude by D-Dot. He echoes such an attitude, acknowledging the educational

aspect of going through the "ups and downs" when he expresses, "My overall experience as an

artist was eye opening…dream fulfilling…you know, a roller coaster ride…unfulfilling at the

same time…" Along with his newly gained belief and perspective that the good and the bad

times were actually educational experiences, is the understanding that this knowledge is to be

used, not only to improve the manner in which he navigates the business, but life as well.

Lessons such as what it means to be a team player and being strategic when it comes to

inclusivity rather than exclusivity, have transferred over to life decisions made by D-Dot. He

shares:

> …It's those experiences. I wouldn't have made the Benjamins…I probably wouldn't
>
> have made the records. And I had this family and doing other things. I might have
>
> become this selfish, recluse---by myself and never had kids…just been this bachelor and
>
> just… you never know.

Speaking about "wearing too many hats" at the label in attempt to maintain maximum

control, Angelettie highlights a fundamental lesson l*earned* that can be evidenced by his choice

to be married and experience *life* as a team player, rather than as a "single" person with

responsibility to no one but himself and his own interests:

> ...One of my experiences…was being a label owner in 1998…also, the manager and the
>
> artist…all at the same time…and one of the mistakes I made was wearing all of those
>
> hats simultaneously, as opposed to delegating those responsibilities to others…

Angelettie's acknowledgement that he made a mistake in his career by moving unilaterally, along with him applying the lessons learned from his expressed mistake to his personal life, recasts his label experience as a rite of passage. He went from experiencing the industry as a new artist with novel dreams, to understanding his experience and its value as a repository of life lessons that facilitated his desire to belong to a strong team based on a culture of *love,* rather than one of "strictly" business. As a student of the industry, D-Dot now navigates life as part of a solid team in a state of "Family-hood."

FIGURE 4.7 D-DOT/FAMILY

The above experiences will now be examined against two tenets of Critical Race Theory including Whiteness as Property and Interest Convergence. The following will include an analysis of specific events from each artist's experience that speak to the extent to which these impediments and mechanisms of racialized control existed while they navigated the industry.

Whiteness as Property and Interest Convergence--Meaning and Context

Whiteness as Property

Cherryl Harris, (1993) posits that Slavery serves as the link that connects "white privilege" and the subordination of blacks through a "legal" regime that attempted to convert blacks into "objects of property" (p.1721). She adds that in a similar fashion, the seizure of Native American land reified their privilege through a system of property rights that at once, by virtue of "race," rendered all "others," right to first possession invisible and justified conquest. Harris (1993), adds that it is this racist formulation that wove white privilege into the very fabric and definition of property, such that possession was defined solely as an extension of *whiteness*. Thus, according to Harris (1995), their projection of the notion that property possession/ownership was exclusively a right reserved for white culture, "laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness—that which whites alone possess—is valuable and property" (p. 1721).

Parallel to the plight of Native Americans', in terms of the revocation and reinterpretation of their status as first possessors/rightful owners of their land and culture, black artists as cultural others are also reinterpreted as "untrue possessors" of their "art" by the label's dominant culture. The culture in question, belonging to the label, presents itself and its impersonal, neutral affect as being one based strictly on *business*. Meanwhile, its attributes parallel those observed when whiteness performs as property in the presence of non-whiteness. The label and holders of whiteness, in this case seem interchangeable. The question that arises is the degree to which the "culture" of business, which by rule, has no capacity for valuing or considering "others" cultural presence, is an extension of the proprietary domain of whiteness. Black artists, being inextricably woven into the fabric of their cultural products/art within such industry environments, become subjected to the same processes of control, exclusion and redefinition imposed on their art.

Within the industry culture, black males are literally reduced to being perceived as a collateral *aspect* of their commoditized art, and as such are relevant only as unavoidable appendages of the products they created; a soul in the can…

Interest Convergence

According to Derrick Bell (1995), "The theory of interest convergence provides: The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p.22). One of the most notable examples is the perceived gains of the *Brown vs Board of Education decision*, in 1954 which ended the legal acceptance of separate but equal educational facilities, as it integrated the public-school systems of America. America was able to claim it was truly democratic to critics here and abroad, while Blacks gained access to close proximity with whites, in hopes of fulfilling the expectation of gaining benefit by simply being close to whiteness. Conversely, in the years since *Brown*, it has been largely agreed upon that in the name desegregation, *Brown* facilitated the sanctioned permanent removal of black assets in black communities and the repulsion of black culture in white spaces. It has come to be more an example of interest divergence, rather than convergence. The reality is, the party with the lesser power (usually blacks) going into the arranged convergence of interests between blacks and whites, typically suffers the sacrifice of their interests, when convergence no longer holds utility for whites. Bell (1995) speaks to this in more definitive terms: "Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary peaks of progress, short lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance" (p.306).

Bell (1996) posits that one of the principle points of asymmetry in Interest convergence scenarios as exemplified by *Brown,* is Black people's tendency to have faith in the ideal

represented by civil rights legislation, in terms of equality, rather than the reality. Instead of activism based on racial idealism and the search for racial equality, Bell (1995) suggests that a shift to racial realism is vital to our forward movement beyond unrealistic, faith based convergence scenarios with whiteness. According to Bell (1995), embracing such a position "requires us to acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status." He adds that such an acknowledgement, "enables us to avoid despair and frees us to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph" (p.306).

Whiteness as Property--Analysis

Akil

Holders of whiteness, according to Harris (1995) retain all the rights accorded to general property owners, including: "the right to transfer, the right to use and enjoyment, and the right to exclude others" (p. 1731). If the "label" and "holders of whiteness" are indeed interchangeable, then the act of being signed is tantamount to being chosen by whiteness and granted some but not all of its protections and privileges. In Akils case, he and other black artists were being excluded and "othered" from within whiteness, as a conditional member who is not privy to all of the perks usually afforded the holder of whiteness. Akil highlights the limited membership illustrative of internal "othering" done, by what could be perceived as whiteness as property in action: "I had my ups and downs about it and stuff… I would say the upside is just always wanting to be signed to a label…wanting to have that experience of being signed to the label, but the down side would be not receiving all the perks of being signed."

Another fundamental aspect of whiteness as property is its ability to reinterpret and ignore the rule of first possession when it comes to "others." Harris (1995) observes that in the case of the Indians, only particular forms of possession, particularly those characteristic of white

settlement, would be recognized and legitimated. In a parallel manner, the possession of

Blackness and its attendant culture, which is maintained by black artists, in many cases, is safely

ignored and considered to be "not truly possessed." As such, it is believed to be in need of white

reinterpretation, due to the perception that it is too ambiguous and unclear. The following

example by Akil, illustrates a reinterpretation of blackness, that, rather than a by-product of the

general culture of business, appears to be more characteristic of being an object of whiteness:

> We did the deal and stuff, and the record is doing way better than expected and stuff
>
> so…now, they like really trippin, but still no urban play or nothing like that so I'm still
>
> wanting to be in that world, at least to be validated and stuff, you know what I
>
> mean…See I understand "that black folks don't buy records" and stuff like this, you
>
> know.

Akil offers another example of *reinterpretation* that highlights the possession and

interpretive powers of whiteness, as it functions as property. Harris (1995) makes a correlation

between the privilege of whiteness and the subordination of blackness existing as an inversely

functional relationship. When applied to the major labels, the contractual objectification of

blacks as objects of white privilege, extends to Black label executives hired to act as a buffer,

while representing the possession and interpretive characteristics of whiteness. Akil highlights

this phenomenon with the following example, quoted at length:

> Yea I mean…Black people lynch Black people…That Black guy at the label Kevin
>
> Black…Its ironic…he basically tried to lynch us…But you know, we didn't get that
>
> energy directly from "massa," even though he has the final say so…It came from the
>
> *negro*…the uncle tom…they went back and told the master…look at these niggas trying
>
> to run away, we ought to lynch this nigga…Cut they foot off and cripple they ass.

Tracey Lee

> So…my mind was free and open at that particular time, but when I got into the
> game—got signed and I encountered all of these things that I had never encountered
> before…then I'd be lying if I said it didn't stifle my creativity…that it didn't affect me
> mentally…you know with regards to my approach…and considering what…
> quote/unquote, my "bosses" deemed as the right material to put out there
> commercially… because they own all the cards—they are the ones—they are the
> gatekeepers now… I am the creator…but they have the final say so as to what is being
> put out and what is not being put out---now I have to perform.

In Lee's case, there are strong indicators per the above recollection, that race played a
significant role in the actual experience, while being camouflaged by what is commonly held to
be a race neutral contract. The above example illustrates many of the indicators pointed out by
Harris (1995) that reveal the underlying presence of whiteness functioning as property as it seeks
to subordinate and convert Black artists such as Lee into objects of that property. He speaks to
being pressured into conforming to a process that removed his right of possession and reduced
him, through white interpretation, from being an artist, with the right to "truly possess" that
identity, to being their performer. Lee's own words express this reality when he states, "I am the
creator, but they have the final say so as to what is being put out and what is not put out. Now I
have to perform."

Lee expresses an inability to make music on his own terms, in the above quote, which
parallels Harris (1995) observation regarding the treatment of Native Americans at the hands of
whiteness. She posits that, "Only particular forms of possession—those that were characteristic
of white settlement—would be recognized and legitimated" (p.1707). She adds, "Indian forms of

possession were perceived to be too ambiguous and unclear" (p.1707). This perception made it easy for holders of whiteness to ignore other forms of possession. Lee's above example exemplifies whiteness functioning as property. The following example speaks to the presence of whiteness as property being camouflaged by the neutrality of "business," as it ignores the rule of first possession, regarding Lee as not possessing the right to express himself as a cultural authority, through his music. Instead this right was ignored on the grounds that his possession was one that is "untrue." Lee expresses this scenario in the following quote:

> I think it was more or less um…you're a novice…you don't know what you're talking about—you haven't been in this game long enough…we've seen things come and go…whether it be hip hop, r and b, pop, rock, soul…what have you---you just don't know enough…you don't have the experience…plus!! You don't know the people I know. You can tell—it's that button---that's essentially what it is---you don't know what buttons I can push…you don't know who I have an influence on, you don't know who I can lean on…therefore, you are in the dark when it comes to this. Just make the records and we'll decide if it…you know what I'm saying.

Lee has a strong sense of being stripped of his right to express culture. The following excerpt highlights elements of whiteness functioning as property underneath the business veneer perceived as race neutral. One particular element, the contingency of race dictating the right to first possession, is subtly on display once again. In Lee's following recollection, he speaks directly to Harris claim that Indian forms of possession were ignored and erased because they were deemed to be "untrue" and too ambiguous and unclear to matter:

> They want to put a box…they want to put me in a box…they want to label me…you see what I'm saying…therefore again!... it goes back to the artistic expression cause they---

you dropped the ball on presentation…so now people don't even know…what they getting themselves into when they pick up an album, hear me in a interview…when they see me in person they don't know what they ---they don't know nothing...but "The Theme"…and he has an album with a lot of personalities—which…you know…several people have done…and the fans get it…so…get the fuck outta here.

Deric Angelettie-(D-Dot)

Angelettie's admission that "whoever cuts the check is in power, period" speaks to the dominance of the ownership over label best practices, which are always inextricably tied to profit. It also invites a closer look at label ownership and in so doing highlights the historical reality that there has never been black ownership of the major label/distribution machines that have traditionally been the main profiteers from "others" cultures. Once again, the question is begged, is the label exerting monied power or racialized power in the context of ownership?

The reinterpretation and eventual willful ignorance of black cultural possession, spoken to by Harris (1995), parallels the description of Angelettie's understanding of how power works. In the following excerpt D-Dot purposely deracializes the power differential he felt, while illustrating the very reinterpretation that comes at the hands of the all-pervasive proprietary control exhibited by white privilege. Comparing the following excerpt to the erasure and coopting of possession done to Black slaves and Native Americans discussed in Harris' (1995), the word "it" would refer to white privilege and its perceived exclusive right to "property-tize" and thus, by virtue of its whiteness, justifiably own all in its domain: "It doesnt really coincide with your agenda…It doesn't always coincide with your staff or your dream…and so, you have those battles…so…you know, those experiences we all experience…and its not a white/black thing…it's a power/unpower thing."

"It's a power/unpower thing could be substituted for "white/un-white thing" in the above mentioned quote from D-Dot. Further illustrative of Harris' (1995) work, where she expresses the tendency of whiteness to subdue the cultural aspect of "others," and superimpose an "official" whiteness inspired, re-interpretation onto the "others" as a perceived function of the natural order of things, is Angelettie's capitulation of the following experience:

> It was a conflict because, you know, it's really no emotions in those rooms…for one…Two…I was there to be a CEO, but I'm also the artist…So from a CEO perspective, the company that I was signed to, which was Columbia Records…They wanted me to think more like them…um…which sometimes conflicts with being an artist…um…and so…my mistake was, I went at the heads of the label.

This example mirrors Harris' understanding of the rule of first possession, being that it is only effectively rendered contingent on the race of the possessor. The executives who were white, wanted D-Dot to subdue his cultural affect and "be more like them." The identity he possessed was ignored in their context, in their white settlement. Much like Indian forms of possession according to Harris (1995), D-Dot's form of possession was perceived to be not legitimate and perhaps a bit "too ambiguous and unclear" (p.1722). Hence, as it relates to Angelettie's possession of his own identity and the forms by which he expresses it, only those particular forms of possession that are characteristic of white settlement, are to be recognized in the above experience, expressed by Angelettie.

Angelettie provides yet another example that illustrates the "reinterpretation" and "untrue-possession" themes iterated by Harris (1995) in her description of whiteness being analogous to property. His recollection, when compared to Harris (1995) conception of "whiteness as property," lends credence to the notion that race (i.e. not being white) as an

inhibitor of culture/identity, may have played more of an active role in Angelettie's experience than not:

> The conflict…was because at the time, it was my opinion, the culture vulture syndrome that we go through…where, we are the culture, but we pass it off to people that we don't know…and they mix it with their agenda…and it comes out on the other side unclear to us… Right. Right, and things that they want to do that they feel will help make money…but it doesn't necessarily coincide with your soul…

Similar to the many tenuous attempts to separate notions of race and class in this country, there is a strong case to be made for the existence of a culture of "racialized business," in the music industry, as opposed to a race neutral, strictly business culture. As evidenced by the aforementioned examples, there are stark enough similarities between the manner in which white power proprietarily performs, as discussed by Harris, and the manner in which "money power" performs in the music business, according to Angelettie, to not easily be able to dismiss either perspective as *the* reality. However, to be sure, a white artist, by virtue of his whiteness will not lose his natal identity as a consequence of conforming to the "anti-cultural" ethos of the predominantly white owned music *business,* whereas a black artist, whose right to possess "Blackness" may be reinterpreted as "untruly possessed," is subject to a legal/contractual redefinition of his very identity, according to the *business* sensibilities of an owner who has been traditionally male and white.

Interest Convergence--Analysis

Akil

Aside from the initial convergence of interests signified by a binding contractual agreement to do business, there are many examples that parallel the power dynamic contained

within whiteness as it transfers its desires onto those it seeks to use for its own benefit. Akil experiences a situation that explicitly illustrates interest convergence at the label. In his recollection, Akil speaks to the convergence as not being a product of mutual desire to do so by both parties, but one of necessity and convenience for the more powerful entity (the white label head). After three years of failed attempts to meet with their label head and discuss their future as artists on the label, Akil describes how they finally were granted a meeting and what it took. Had the meeting not occurred the last album they were contracted to release may have never been created and released, due to their being dropped. Akil expresses the situation in the following:

> coming around to the third album …so we tried to get a meeting…with Jimmy Iovine…it takes us like three years…Basically couldn't even get a meeting…only reason why we got a meeting with him was because my manager ended up managing Damien Marley at the time that they had put out that Welcome to Jamrock…so it was just a 12 inch…it wasn't even out on a label…it was just, you know…wasn't even on a label… So Jimmy Iovine—he trying to get at Damien…so now he got to go through my manager now … So *that's* what prompted him to have a conversation with us at Interscope.

Iovine's interests were aimed at securing Damian Marley as an artist on Interscope Records. Akil's manager was managing Marley at the time. In order for Iovine to have a shot at meeting with Walley, in order to sign Marley and capitalize from the momentum generated by his current single at the time. Akil was able to benefit from Iovine's interests by requesting a meeting at the time Iovine was attempting to secure acquiring Damian as an artist. If Iovine continued to deny Akil a meeting to discuss a timeline for releasing the next Jurassic album, he ran the risk of being denied a meeting with Walley. Consequently, the meeting was held, but it didn't yield the results Akil was hoping for, in terms of setting them up for sustainable success.

As Bell (1995) pointed out, when Black and White's interests appear to converge, at best the result will be "temporary peaks of progress, short lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance." Iovine feigned all-in commitment but as time went by, continued to market Jurassic 5 as an alternative rap group.

Tracey Lee

…So there's another instance where you know that whole dynamic of stifling the creative aspect, stifling me as an artist for the company's interest on what they think is in a single you know that they can work and push to radio. But! Then you have…and then here we go with… it's not business! It's not a science! It's not calculated formula stuff…this is a *gut* feeling…this is what art is ---a gut! A feeling…that's what art is—so my gut feeling was not gonna work! But your science…

The above example is illustrative of a pattern that exists where a racialized interest convergence has historically been observed in various facets of society. Essentially black and White Interests converge and are solidified on a legal basis. The black component of the convergence seeks proximity to whiteness as a solution to the problem of access to resources, while the white component creates distance within the established legal parameters. This distance, rather than being based on physical proximity is ideological in nature, predicated on the belief that blackness, specifically its cultural identity, is an untrue possession and as such, is ignorable. *Brown vs Board* exemplifies such an interest convergence, and is similar in effect to the manner in which black artists' interests converge with the label. In both cases, proximity to whiteness was wrongfully conflated with having full access to white resources.

Albeit, both are largely perceived to be legal/contractual victories, in terms of black interests being served (access to better resources through integration), in the actual new white

space, Black cultural possession was and is found to be even more acutely repossessed by whiteness. In the wake of the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision, the number of employed black teachers was drastically reduced, along with the cultural affect that they infused into the educative space. As proven by *Brown*, proximity and equality are mutually exclusive terms where blackness enters white spaces. Race matters. This observation highlights the qualitative difference in experience between both racial parties in a union based on converging interests, where power is asymmetrically distributed based on race and made binding according to a legal contract, considered to be race neutral.

In the case of education, it was a legal decision and the perceived strength of legislation versus *racism* that many blacks in society thought would positively impact their quality of life. In the case of black artists on a label, it is the recording contract and its perceived power to bring a level of guaranteed access to security and a higher quality of life than they would have enjoyed otherwise. In both cases, it can be said that proximity to whiteness rather than equality is the central theme. In both cases, the collateral damage from interest convergence scenarios with whiteness is the negation and eventual sacrifice of "other" culture. The jurisdictional presence of whiteness strengthens its ability to exclusively possess, interpret and erase "other" culture, despite and because of either, the law or the record contract. The presence of that jurisdictional whiteness seemed to be at play in Tracey Lee's experience as a signed artist.

Deric Angelettie-(D-Dot)

The following excerpt by D-Dot is illustrative of a convergence of interests between the label and the artist. At its best, the converging relationship between Angelettie and the label is characterized by him receiving attention and resources towards being heavily marketed, while the label benefits from the investment, receiving maximum return from the product they

contractually own, initially created by D-Dot. Angelettie dramatizes a situation he encountered at the label, that highlights the expectations between the label and the artist, relative to their converging interests. He recounts:

> And that's the real…. I'm speaking as if I'm them, like…listen D-Dot…you right…you that dude…fuck it, we'll comb your hair for you…we'll give you a massage…If that's what you need…but at the end of the day, you walking in here with that joint yet?! All that ranting and raving, and all that cultural shit you talking and all that, Hip Hop shit…where's the hits nigga! Like that's…like really!! When you think about it, that's really why I'm there!

In Angelettie's case, the convergence was based on the artist expectation of being positioned for fame and longevity as an employed talent, while the label's expectation was to be the sole financial benefactor/recipient of the lion's share of the capital generated from the hired talent's creations/product, once marketed and promoted in the marketplace. Once the artist is no longer perceived to be in the "best interest" of the label, monetarily, the artist is no longer of value and is thus denied access to all resources and comforts that validated their artistic identity and status as a person of import within the industry. At this point, the label, which has the ability to realize the artists' dreams of fame and fortune effectively becomes a gatekeeper (for whiteness as property?), possessing the power to exclude and include artists based on their ability to maximize profits, their main interest. Angelettie illustrates:

> That's why I'm there! So, if I aint got it, then ok…so you ranting and raving…you're yelling at us…screaming at us…calling us culture vultures…and you aint delivering us no hits yet?! yea alright cool…the door is that way bro… And I got it…I totally got it…not upset—not emotional...I just...I totally got it…they was absolutely right…but I

coulda did *all* that. If I was delivering hits they would've dealt with *all* that…they would

have combed my hair every day.

The ahistorical, non-cultural, impersonal affect that characterizes and informs the manner

in which business is conducted in the music industry, may be less, a product of a "racially

neutral" "culture of business/money," and more a product of the "whiteness" undergirding it.

Through "whiteness'" consistent and historical ownership of the music "business," makes it

highly probable that the "major label" functions as a racially biased, business entity. Thus, for

the label, the imminent convergence of interests represented by the contractual nature of business

in the music industry, may be more motivated by notions of "true possession" of "others'

culture" in the name of "whiteness," rather than profit alone.

Chapter 5: Findings—Students

The purpose of the study was to explore how professional black male recording artists and black male students deal with the way unequal power works in the recording industry and the classroom. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

    1. How do contemporary professional Black male recording artists navigate the recording industry's tendency to restrain their personal "voice" and creative agency in the process of commodifying their talents?

    2. How do Black male youth navigate classroom spaces to maintain their personal "voice" and creative agency?

    3. Are there similarities between the experiences of Black male artists and Black males in the education system and how they navigate the power differential they face?

This chapter contains 2 sections. *The first* introduces the artist participants and presents brief profiles of each. The participants consented to using their actual names in this research project in an effort to reflect maximum authenticity through this research project. *The second* section presents a brief overview of the themes and data supporting the axial themes that emerged from the interviews. This includes an analysis of the role played by Whiteness as property and Interest convergence in the power dynamic of each overall experience.

5.1   The Participants—Students

Three Black male students currently residing in Atlanta, Georgia, participated in this study. Each of them participated in four individual interviews. Below is a detailed description of the participants. Their own words have been used wherever appropriate to provide a more comprehensive sense of their identities:

Jerquan Maddox- Jerquan ("Jemmy Oxygen.") is a 21-year-old Atlanta native and a graduate of Carver High School, in Atlanta, Georgia. His demeanor is very reserved and quiet, but not shy. Donning shoulder length Dreadlocks and a very slight frame, Jerquan, a light brown black male stands at roughly six feet. Jerquan was a dually enrolled student at Georgia State University while attending Carver High School as part of the Early College program. He is also an aspiring Hip Hop artist. Jerquan has a Hip Hop skillset that includes music production (editing, mixing, mastering, vocal engineering) as well as composing tracks, songwriting, and performing live.

To get a more comprehensive feel of how Jerquan perceives himself, I asked him to tell me who he is, as a *human:*

Ahh…Jemmy Oxygen would be a pretty laid-back person---And I'm on a search for happiness, trying to reach Nirvana someway… (chuckles) I got to get there!

Pretty much, that's how I would explain myself man, pretty peaceful person…

I'm just looking for happiness and I want to feel some love G!! Feels like it's being replaced by so much more. I just want to feel some love—

Deshawn Fleming. Deshawn is a 21-year-old native of Atlanta. Standing at roughly six feet, Deshawn, who has a light brown complexion, is often clean shaven, sporting a very neat closely cropped beard and a short, conservative haircut. He graduated in the top 10% of his class from Washington High School and now attends Georgia State University with a double major in Computer Information Systems and Managerial Sciences. He was also dually enrolled as an Early College student, where he simultaneously attended Georgia State and Washington High School. Deshawn is an aspiring Hip Hop artist. His Hip Hop skillset features the technical

(editing, mixing, mastering, vocal engineering) as well as the musicianship aspects of music production. When asked how he defines himself as a human Deshawn shares the following:

> To be human, to me, means…you have a lot to give but at the same time you still flawed. I believe… like I genuinely care for people. I like to see the best in people. I don't ever walk into a situation assuming the worse. I'm more so a realist.

Omari Hargrove. Omari ("FAISE ONE") is a 19-year-old graduate of Carver High School. Omari stands roughly five feet, six inches tall. His complexion is dark brown and he sports long dreadlocks, pulled up in a massive bun at the top of his head. He is an aspiring Hip Hop artist featuring a skillset that includes: Live stage performance, songwriting, film production, and technical production (editing, mixing, mastering, vocal engineering). He also created a program while at Carver High School, for black male empowerment and unity known as the Pharaoh Clan. His artist name, FAISE ONE, expresses his self-proclaimed mission. The acronym stands for "Forever An Inspiration Seeking Eternity, Omari Never Ends." I asked Omari to describe himself as a human being. His response:

> Well I would say FAISE ONE, as the person—you know, the human… would be—a description—someone who feels as though his mission is not solely based on himself, but for others…Even as a young boy--wanted to assist in the progressive movements that he saw…be it civil rights, conscious movement… the community reconstruction and construction movements… I just wanted to assist in those types of movements and at a young age, asked himself how could he assist…to the point where his voice and his ideas could be heard…people could hear him out…and possibly find out what he's offering is actually feasible…And at age five, I asked that question…and the answer came through to me. So he became an artist…so FAISE ONE, you're actually saying the acronym—its,

Forever An Inspiration Seeking Eternity—Omari Never Ends…and my name is
Omari…Born Omari Shaman Hargrove—Omari means the highest or God in Swahili…A
Shaman or (Shay MAN) means medicine man, and Hargrove—*Har—grove* means *of* the
grove…So…basically my mission is…its present in my name…the highest shaman of the
grove—or the highest healer/medicine man of the grove …so…my job was defined in my
name…I didn't disagree with it…I accepted it…I feel like we *do know* what we're here
for sometimes.

5.2 Overview of Themes

PHASE 1
(*I'LL FIGURE IT OUT PHASE*) TRIAL AND ERROR AS A PRE-STRATEGY/INITIAL
NAVIGATION COMPASS.

PHASE 2
(*PEEP GAME PHASE*) GAIN NEW EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE--INTRODUCED TO
STRUCTURE'S PRODUCT/CAPITAL CENTRIC EMPHASIS

PHASE 3
(*NEW ATTITUDE PHASE*) USE NEW BELIEFS, VALUES AND ATTITUDES TO FUEL THE
CALIBRATION/READJUSTMENT OF EXPECTATIONS (VALUES), BELIEFS AND
ATTITUDES

PHASE 4
EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER PHASE) REIMAGINE EXPERIENCE AS A COMING
OF AGE, LIFE LESSON LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

FIGURE 5.1 FOUR PHASE ACCLIMATION PROCESS

Jerquan

Phase 1--(I'll Figure It Out Phase) Trial and Error as a Pre-Strategy

"I'm just looking for happiness and I want to feel some love [Garfield] G!!"

Jerquan's expectations upon entering high school were optimistic having essentially had a pleasant experience with school, up to this point. For Jerquan, who identifies as a peaceful person, there would be no reason for him to expect school not to reflect a similar "vibe." As related to his identity, the following excerpt illustrates, through his disappointment, a pre-established expectation to possess the freedom of meaningful self-expression. He speaks to the disappointment he felt upon realizing that ownership of his individuality was not a "God given" right, afforded students enrolled in school:

Everybody must look the same…Nobody can stand out…Nobody should stand out! Everything must look the same. Everybody must have the same grades. Everybody mind must work the same. And it's scary cause then we have no…there is no…what's the word I'm looking for…I want to say different, but it's another word—variety! There's no…Individuality!! There's no flavor.

Where the structure seemed rigid and uniform, Jerquan instinctively sought out peers whose contrasting personalities provided the flexibility and diversity which he expected to be exposed. Making friends became Jerquan's early trial and error strategy towards carving a nurturing, organic space within the perceived harsh and controlled environment school was shaping up to be. Jerquan proudly details his proactivity around maintaining a diverse set of friends within a system that he perceived as intolerant of diversity, sharing, "I had, due to the fact that I hang around people with very different personalities—*some* people, playful…*some* people that are more serious…"

Jerquan perceived that there was a profound lack of *love* in high school. He expressed, many times, how he valued the climate that came with love, expressing that it was necessary and vital to the space he inhabited in school. In addition to the need to see more love in the space, Jerquan also began to perceive that love, when it was shown, wasn't distributed evenly. "G. Everybody wants to be loved the same," was Jerquan's reflective afterthought when asked if this uneven distribution of love affected him personally. One of the picture metaphors provided by Jerquan, for his overall high school experience, features the theme of love prominently, highlighting his expectation that school would be fundamentally more "loving" than the society it was preparing students for. Beyond school, Jerquan feels like love should be the focus of all "real life" systems. He explains the picture's significance:
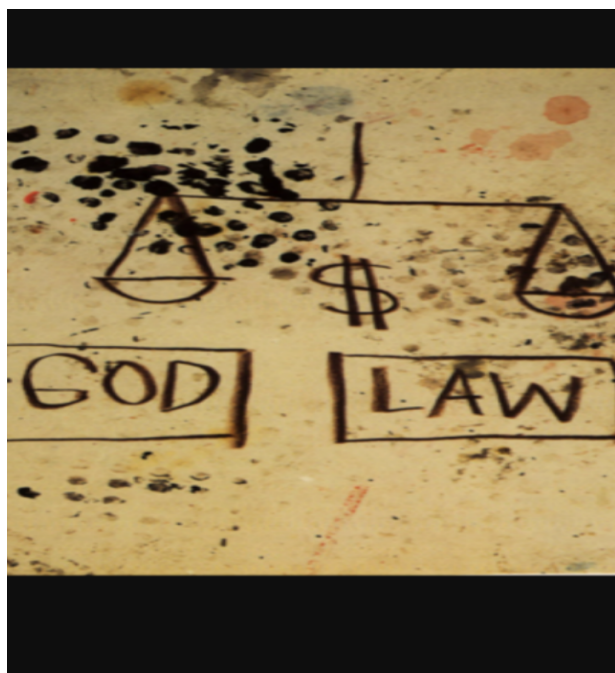

"Aight…I'm working with Jean Michele Basquiat…it's the balance between morals...it's actually…it's like life…the only thing that's missing in this picture is love!! And that should be in the middle…"

FIGURE 5.2 GOD AND LAW

Jerquan perceived the anti-creative, assembly line, tendency of *school*, being a new high school student coming of age, as an affront to his very ability to potentially create identity affirming separation. He recalls how lunchtime, instead of being free time to socialize and eat,

was literally policed at school, making it difficult for him and his friends to hold the freestyle ciphers that allowed them to express their rhymes and sharpen their skills:

> Like during lunch time, it's either playing cards or we rhyming at the table…Once you in there, man…I guess they try to keep everything down to a minimum as far as you talking…we aint supposed to be playing cards—we aint supposed to be doing nothing at lunch but really just eating and conversating at a minimum voice level…But, we'll sit up at the table and we'll do our thing up until somebody come shut us down saying like Hey Hey! Yall need to calm down man! Yall making entirely too much noise! --You know how you got the in-school suspension? It was kinda like more of them type of guys who was up there, instead of our actual teachers…you got them and then you got the police standing up there too—so we got to wiggle through all that! But you know, hey man…we gone do our thing—We started to avoid going to lunch altogether…shit we'll either hit Wooty house or find a train track and go up there and kick rhymes and turn the music up and come back after lunch.

As a person who self identifies as an artist, Jerquan's perception that school frowns upon creativity and uniqueness, casts *school* as an adversarial space that must still be tolerated and survived to completion, in order to achieve maximum benefit from the experience. He exclaims, "…yall trying to take my creativity away from me…but at the same time…like I said, I still gotta—you know…I got family…" For Jerquan, early on, survival in a space that may not be constructed to show love or tolerance for cultural expression, was the challenge that presented itself to him. Meeting such a challenge everyday was a vital part of his educational process, unwittingly characterized by most who view it from the outside, as *just going to school*. Going

forward, he would have to find ways to navigate and mitigate the perceived lack of love and concern for creativity, in order to survive and adjust to existing within such a space.

Phase 2--(Peep Game Phase)-Gain New Experiential Knowledge

Jerquan's exposure to the contrasting value placed on love in the school space contributed to his burgeoning awareness of, what he perceived to be, a low standard of love in the school space. This awareness, based on more experiences validating such a belief, created even more of a desire within Jerquan to experience richer, meaningful interactions between himself and the teachers, extending beyond the content area: "They just teach us out the book G--they have they head in a book the whole time…and they want us to have our head in the book the whole—we don't even look the teacher in the eye half of the class period."

While navigating an environment perceived by Jerquan to be primarily concerned with suppressing uniqueness through uniformity, he developed the attitude that despite having to conform to authority, losing yourself is the *worst* thing that can happen to you. In his words, "…you gotta maintain yourself G, in order NOT to lose yourself…losing yourself is probably one of the worst things to do!" Jerquan also became acutely aware of the manner in which *school* expects obedience and acceptance of their agenda, especially as it related to possession of his own identity. He expresses dissatisfaction with the expectation to blindly accept and obey orders to satisfy their ideal, and likens school unto the military: "I think about it G, cause that's slightly like being in the Army! You feeding people the wrong information and you leading them down this pathway, just like everybody else…and at the end its no win…because once you on the path to happiness, whose happiness, is it?"

Jerquan, at this point, begins to ponder the probability that the school system is not *able* to understand him as an individual who is living the experience of being a student. When asked

what would be the outcomes of situations where he felt misunderstood by authority and penalized as a result, he quickly and emphatically replied, "For the most part, when people don't understand where I'm coming from…hate to say it, but *I* lose." Jerquan noticed at this point in his experience, that instead of attempting to understand his opinions, those in authority typically used their power to suppress his critical thought: "People don't understand you…so your outlooks on certain situations…they don't understand…they just don't get it…and then it becomes a problem…because instead of them trying to understand…they trying to appoint their opinions over yours."

Observations, such as those above made by Jerquan, fortified a strong belief that his self-expression was limited to the objectives of the school structure and its vision of what a student should be. When asked how he perceived his ability to freely express himself in school, he lamented "… for the most part, we kinda limited to the structure of the school system." Adding to the notion that students are limited by the structure of school, in terms of self- expression, is Jerquan's observation and belief that owning a unique personality can be enough cause to be kicked out of class and branded a trouble maker. According to Jerquan's experience, students seem to be unfairly put out, often, based on the prejudice of the teacher:

Like the teacher might be teaching or might not be teaching! It might be the slightest of conversation going on—you can ask for a pen! It can turn into a joke! That comes to laughter…I mean you're being a human being---you're gonna laugh when something's funny---right or wrong? —Due to the fact that the teacher know that this person is, I don't want to say a class clown, but he's a *joker*—he's the first one that exits the class—first one to get put out. And the situation didn't have *nothing* to do with him…

Jerquan began to notice, in other instances, that his inclination to express himself according to his *own* convictions was considered inherently substandard, and potentially insubordinate, according to the school culture. In the following excerpt, he also highlights the school's built in assumption that even considering the usage of his personal voice, as a viable option for such an assignment was inherently flawed, since it entailed deviating from the form in which it was expected to be written:

> Like…when it comes to certain projects…and you have an outline…let me say, as far as writing an essay… They say, you got a specific form to write your essay…What it means is, you start with your hypothesis and they *slightly* want you to answer the question, but they don't want you to *answer* the question…in the end, when it comes down to the body…I mean…it's your expression regardless!!…I mean sure, it's a *way* to put it, but…snatching my creativity away from me?…and…making me put sentences in places I don't feel they go!?...That changes the meaning of what *I'm* trying to say!

Phase 3--(New Attitude Phase)—Application of New Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

Experientially, more mature, Jerquan was now clear. A successful navigation of the culture of school would entail and depend upon his ability to balance the coercive, rule based expectations of the structure and his own convictions around the right to express individuality/creativity. Or in his words, "Yea…It's gotta be a balance G! I mean, what you put in is what you receive…I do feel like my balance was achieved, due to the fact that I did make it out." Part of making it out, according to Jerquan, was embracing the agency to pushback while possessing the discernment to know when and when not to do so: "I mean…you gotta understand the situation…some bridges do need to be burned and some don't…but you have to know, the

effects of the bridges—the effects of the box—the things that's making the box—you have to be aware of the effects of those things."

Despite his awareness of the need for discernment, Jerquan felt strongly that all students reserve the right to not have to conform, or fit in a structure, for the sake of being subordinate to authority. Fueling such skepticism towards school was a general lack of trust in the notion that teachers are leaders and authority figures, to be followed and blindly respected. When asked about this lack of buy-in when it comes to authority figures, particularly teachers in his high school setting, Jerquan replied, "…I don't know if I can trust it…me and trust don't get along." Such an attitude of distrust in authority seemed to lay the foundation for Jerquan's critical disposition as a student as he progressed through his high school experience. When asked, Jerquan shared the source of his distrust as he revealed the pivotal moment when his disillusionment with school and lowered expectations regarding teachers began:

> I wasn't sure if it was middle school or high school though…somewhere, I made that transition…Once I realized that the teachers were normal people…cause when you little you look up the teachers like… as this big person! Man…teachers in the parking lot getting high man…they running around playing like we playing…this what really killed me…we went on this trip to Puerto Rico with the school. It was…four or five teachers I think…This male teacher and this female teacher had a room together…I never thought that was supposed to happen…Never thought that was supposed to…that changed my whole aspect…you know, they still got they teacher title…but it's like, man…outside of this school, you aint no different… I got to the point where I just stopped expecting stuff…

Tone setting moments like the aforementioned, occurring outside of the classroom space, negatively colored Jerquan's perception of school's capacity for displaying genuineness and an ethic of caring for its students. With doubts, as to the school's ability to be honest, Jerquan struggled with the reality of trying to find a balance between, either conforming and adapting to the school's indifferent structure as a means to survive and cultivate employment related skillsets, or retaining the portion of himself that was not controlled by school:

> Yea…I mean I know that's one of my routes out!...It will make you sit back and think a little bit…I mean...I don't… wouldn't say turn your back on who you are, but…it's a lot of things that determine who you are…just like I said, but then you become the image that *somebody else* want you to portray…And not the image that *you* want to portray…But at the same time, I mean…when money get involved, a nigga still got to survive out there…

Finding that balance could often lead to points where Jerquan's sensibilities clashed with the absolute authority of the school structure. In such cases, his own words reflect the attitude he possessed regarding the conflict, when he states, "Actually if it's a clash…Imma win!" He continues:

> Cause I can't let nobody threaten me G! I gotta be…I gotta be myself! I gotta be myself. I gotta be 100 with myself. If I'm not 100 with myself then I'm not 100 with nobody else. That's just like me doing things—this what I try to get to people---this is why people mess up a lot…because they *do* things and they don't understand *why* they doing them… and so, you don't have that thought process for yourself! So! I won't allow myself to be broken like that…Unless I fully understand something…I will not—without acknowledging it myself--I can't be broken!

Jerquan's experience, as he attempted to navigate at this point, was rife with contrasting and conflicting approaches and actions as he sought to find the most respectable balance. He likens his seeking of balance to playing tug of war, with no clear solution, especially when survival is a main consideration:

I mean, its mind boggling—its twisting…cause you don't know which way to go! —it's like playing tug of war… you don't know which way to go…because you got to *survive*…They trying to take art away from you…so how do you survive when you in a box! But you know how to---your survival skills are *outside* the box! But you have to stay in this box, and you don't really know what to do here…but you know what to do on the *outside*…so...I mean what do we do about that situation?

> *every word in this song is reality*
> *life and time, they go on—reality*
> *Day and night, right--wrong-reality*
> *Some folks eat and some folks won't--reality*
> *No doubt, make ya wanna stand up and shout*
> *Or close ya eyes and just imagine*
> *Til you see your way out*
> *(Advice to my younger self on "reality"—Garfield)*

Frustrated with the discomfort of not being nurtured as an individual in the school culture, Jerquan considered dropping out as a course of action: "All I want to do is graduate and go---that's it!!! Because if I would've had my choice I probably would have been dead gone---I probably would have dropped out G!" Jerquan used his aversion to "losing," however, to mitigate against acting on thoughts of dropping out stating, "…and you see them same people sitting on that same corner doing the same thing…I don't want that to be me." Determined that the streets are a dead end and not quite feeling convinced that school is the best place to be

either, Jerquan's way of navigating school, from this point, became one that was based on a combination of detachment, suspended expectations and a very cautious optimism:

> I don't expect it to go good…but I'm prepared for the worse. I know what could possibly happen and I know what I'm aiming for! You know exactly what you getting yourself into! And you done learned the way to prevent it…don't expect nothing. But you know something bad gone happen… I mean you hoping for the best… but you know you aint expecting that its gonna come through… and that's still hard…cause you be finally giving the benefit of the doubt…but as soon as you give that benefit of the doubt, something goes wrong and it just kill everything else behind it…then you try it again…It might work one day.

When asked to provide a sound as a metaphor for his entire high school experience, he offered: "I want to say a gunshot G! It's so intense! And it gets your blood flowing…And especially when you hear it for the first time…but after a while, you know, it kinda…you kinda get used to it! And it's crazy that you…I mean that's the thing that you trying to avoid…"

Phase 4--(Experience Is the Best Teacher) --Reimagine the Experience as a Coming of Age, Life Lesson Learning Opportunity

As Jerquan reflects on the school experience, many questions remain, particularly around the issue of identity. He hoped that going through the educational process would help him better understand himself in preparation for life. I asked Jerquan if there was a single lesson he learned from his high school experience that he now strives to demonstrate in everyday life. He reflects, "The whole situation was crazy to me! It's just like…Ok I think I learned something…I can avoid certain things…I can definitely avoid certain things." Lessons relative to adaptability and

bending enough without breaking characterize the essence of Jerquan's experiences. But for

Jerquan, those answers that would help him find that balance in ways that could be beneficial, in

terms of navigating his adult life, are still a mystery:

> I mean, you gotta know what you getting yourself into! If you get into it…you gotta
>
> know how to maneuver around at it…really like playing a game of chess…Right! So I
>
> mean it could be good…you know to play that role…It could be beneficial to play that
>
> role…but how long can you play that role before you begin losing yourself?!

The concept of self-ownership, fueled Jerquan's determination to vigilantly protect his

sense of self throughout his high school experience. The most important take-away for Jerquan,

consequently, was the acute awareness that those who choose to be individuals and seek to

define themselves independently of how the structure defines them, are labeled problems by the

establishment. Jerquan is clear, at this point in his experiences, that the freedom to define self is

paramount in school and in life. His experiences taught him above all that at the end of the day,

"we are supposed to be exactly what we feel that we are":

> …how we supposed to understand ourselves at a younger age, when it's a problem
>
> being an individual? So, we don't fully understand life, and before we get to that point,
>
> like where we should at least have a grasp of who we are, and we don't have that, we
>
> falling into this image that *they* portraying us…like that's what we supposed to be…And
>
> really, we just supposed to be exactly what *we feel* that we are…

> ***"the future doesn't exist without the present…time doesn't exist without a clock, how can you measure a second… the world still twirl when you die…the nights becomes days, so why they say they white lies?"*** *(Jerquan's lyrical metaphor for his high school experience)*

Jerquan graduated and, according to him, "made it out" of the school system. Despite

conflicts and struggles around finding answers that could help him find the balance he sought

after, Jerquan still found that school held value, relative to learning people, not content. His words were, "I always tried to balance it…I never really came to like a conclusion… Cause I feel like in some ways…school…it actually does help you!" He adds: "…and I had to do like everybody—whatever *they* did…but I mean…I learned a lot too G…it's a learning experience, not just as far as education…as far as learning *people!* It's not about just learning! It's about life, period--life as a whole—they just giving us these subjects that's not gone really help us…"

Jerquan's experiences, over time, justified his vigilant protection of the right to define *self.* To that end, Jerquan explains that he was never interested in competing with others for entry into corporate America, but building with others of like mind, to carve out, define and own a collective space within which to build the capacity to sustain themselves, boss free:

> But I mean I felt that I always been elsewhere…I never had like a---I want to be in this corporate world and work my way up—I've always been like, man… me and my homies need to get together…probably get a little job…earn some money…and put it in the pot and see if we can come out with…let's get a business going…I always had that entrepreneurial mind…

Deshawn

Phase 1--(I'll Figure It Out Phase) Trial and Error as a Pre-Strategy

Before Deshawn's high school tenure began, he had a developed sense of agency regarding owning his identity development process. He entered high school with a strong conviction that no matter the context, or expectations from authority in this new environment, he would reserve the right to own his identity and be who he is*:*

> People go to school and be art majors and stuff…and they always saying you not going to get a job with this and that…but at the same time, they like art! So, let them go to

school and do what they want to do. By them breaking away from that set path that somebody *gave* them, they not walking around thinking…they doing they own personal thing. So, I feel like by me being my own person and breaking away from what somebody already has set up for me, makes me human.

Deshawn placed much value on making friends upon entering his high school experience. Early on, he identified securing friendships as a way to create and ensure that the presence of an extended family culture existed within his school experience. He also exhibits, in the following excerpt, the early signs of strategically befriending people as part of his desire to learn people skills for cultivating long term friendships and peer support systems:

Like you start to see other people's point of view when you go to school…you know, in that school situation when you have an area where everybody is tightly knit…like that way…you start to understand people a whole lot more and you actually…you build up almost an ability to befriend a lot of people.

Deshawn, a high academic achiever, felt supported and even loved by his teachers, most of whom he had proactively identified and related to as mentors, aside from their primary teaching role. He expected for school to have a "family" feel and for Deshawn, it did. As Deshawn puts it, "I liked the whole experience. It felt like it was like a family type of deal." Despite not having a strategy for navigating at this stage in his experience, Deshawn understood early that an ability to adapt was important. With import placed on adapting, Deshawn went a step further and contemplated how he could strategize and proactively tailor his "adapting" so it was uniquely comfortable for him: "And people don't adapt to change well…well, *sometimes* they don't adapt to change well …like, I have to figure out what's *my* niche in this particular situation."

PHASE 2--(PEEP GAME PHASE)-Gain New Experiential Knowledge

As his experience began to broaden, Deshawn observed the dynamics related to discipline and fairness in the school space. His previous disclosure, that he felt love in school, shows up in his sensibility as he describes the school culture, featuring its climate of patience and tolerance for human issues that students may be dealing with. He recollects, speaking as if from a teacher's point of view:

So, they all good kids until they show me otherwise. I believe that's how the teachers always came about it… cause I never saw any teachers ever really have issues---I mean really treat a student different… til they started having consistent issues…and so they give them chance after chance just to be like, you know, they may have had a bad day today, let's go ahead and try this again tomorrow…but if it became like a consistent thing, that's when they started just like, "Yo! I'm not even dealing with this today." That's how they started like disciplining….

Deshawn acknowledges in the above quote, that the immediate authority figures he encountered were not adversarial, but the rules of the structure, especially the strictly enforced uniform policy, created tension as they were perceived by some students to be an unfair attack on their identity/creativity and status as well-behaved students: **"**Well of course, the behavior is a thing…well, they want to get you in a uniform…maybe that stifled a lot of people's creativity…So you're out of uniform, they'll suspend you. They'll send you home if you walk in, without a uniform."

Although Deshawn was never labeled a troublemaker, many of his friends, whom he held in high regard, were being labeled such. Such experiences provided Deshawn with more of an

understanding that *troublemakers* are often times unjustly labeled by teachers and punished by the system: "They see it as somebody defying the system. That's why they try to use the system as their…umm…what's the word… reason for---justification! –that's the word…they use the system as their justification to punish the person or label them as a trouble maker." Deshawn also recognized that in a student versus system clash, such as being in non- compliance with the uniform policy, teachers, as extensions of the system, have all the leverage to break the student: "And that's where they had their clash…but they have all the leverage as far as the system goes. And that's where the trouble comes in…and that's why they almost—it could make or break a person…depending on how bad the fight, between their personality clashing with the system…"

For Deshawn, such an awareness further strengthened his belief that people should not be judged because of their dominant personality, as he noticed that lots of people labeled trouble makers are some of the smartest people he ever met: "Because I know, a lot of those people that got---that were consistently in trouble, were some of the smartest people I ever met. When they came out of high school, some of the most successful people I ever met…some of the most capable people I know…" Deshawn's original instinct to proactively engage people, in order to establish a slightly deeper rapport than typically found between faculty and student, was a tactic that seemed to work, in terms of creating an element of privilege and freedom: "I was a good dude, so…I mean they never saw me do anything rowdy or anything…I mean, that's not my style…So they knew who I was—and we had that connection already, so they would always give me the benefit of the doubt!"

I played basketball for my high school team and at the time, my favorite band was "Morris Day and The Time," a protégé of "Prince," known for wearing contemporary versions of the zoot suit style, popular in the 1940's. My favorite basketball player was Michael Jordan, who

was known for always being impeccably dressed in some incredible suit and tie combination. Next to my sports illustrated collection was a stack of GQ magazines, where I would picture myself as a model wearing all the classiest suits. In high school, influenced by Michael Jordan and "The Time," instead of jeans and sneakers, I wore suits as my favorite fashion statement, complete with a briefcase! Although my friends were the jocks and the hip hoppers of the school (I identified as a hip hop MC), who were often associated with breaking the rules, like Deshawn, I was always given the benefit of the doubt based on my professionally dressed appearance and engaging demeanor, despite having clear associations with those who were labeled "trouble makers."

Phase 3--(New Attitude Phase)—Application of New Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

After absorbing knowledge gained from new experiences, including the expectations of the structure versus those that were self-imposed, Deshawn actively sought to find a balance that he could sustain throughout high school. In his words, "I was pretty consistent with…pretty much, I stuck to the rules as much as I could but I *always* made sure I did my own thing. Made sure I found that balance. I think I did a good job in finding it." Music seemed to be the medium through which Deshawn was able to find and apply his unique expression within a school setting, allowing him to create that balance he needed:

I actually got into music like my 9th grade year. It was actually like the perfect time for me…I had teachers where you was supposed to write raps and…you can put music behind big ole projects and stuff like that…those were requirements actually…so being that was something I already liked to do, I just kind of fell into that…I was always able to express myself. At this point, I never felt like I was in a bottle like I was encased. I was

never boxed up. I was able to pretty much express myself however. And even though I was put into like assignments…you know you can describe certain words as constraints…but if you can take those words and put them—you can create and use them any kind of way…that's just another form of expression. Expression but at the same time you learning… So, you find that balance.

Deshawn's strategy to navigate school as it took more of a purposeful shape, began to clearly show him approaching school assignments as creative opportunities rather than just work. In terms of him successfully navigating school and finding balance in other aspects, Deshawn credits his ability to exercise wisdom. According to Deshawn, knowing when to respectfully pushback, when warranted, and to hold back, when too risky, was vital:

That's actually how I am…I always believe in, 'there was a time and a place for everything'. So…I mean, if this wasn't the time and place to kinda start something against the system or something, I be like yo, I'll just be cool this time…I don't feel like I was compromising myself…I think I was just making the best decision of the time period—at that time…So…and I don't think that's compromising myself…that's just…I think that's just me being me like I always been that person…

Deshawn was always in strategic movement mode, in order to secure maximum personal and academic comfort. He used keen observation skills, learning from others *mistakes* to inform a stealthy path through high school, stating, "I just knew… I moved a little bit more carefully. I realized what the system wanted from me, but I also recognized what I wanted for me—like what I wanted for myself." He adds, "So I make sure I can hold up my end of the deal if you can hold up yours…So, if it's a situation where you give me a set of rules…I'll follow these

rules…but I still gotta be able to do my own thing." He offers an example of what a good balance looks like in a classroom context:

> Ok…so I remember I was supposed to do a project on…I can't even think what it was…I know it was a project for my English class… a lot of people did like reports and project boards and stuff…me and my group, we made a video, plus the music behind it—that's stuff that *I l*ike to do. I felt like I pushed the agenda…I pushed my own agenda while I still did what I was supposed to do. So, I got my practice in and actually put it in like a real situation.

Always compliant with the rules as a matter of his character and principle, Deshawn points out that in cases where the expectations of the school structure and his personal sensibilities contrast, he was willing to incur the penalties for standing firm on his principles. He offers an example where he was willing to fail a class, at the risk of losing his top ten percent class ranking in order to honor his personal identity above the rule based expectations of the school:

> So, he told me to stay for a couple—this ROTC class…like I didn't want to stay there cause they was gone make cut off---shave all my hair. But I was like…I'm not doing that for a class! A high school class—like I'm not gonna do that—If I had to do that, I was going to fail the class G…I was prepared to fail the class if that was the case. I mean, like I said, I had no interest in the military. I had no interest in what the class represented because I felt like I can get---I can learn those same lessons that was for—like in life! I don't need a class to teach me that…and those were like some really important lessons the class tried to teach you…but I felt like it was a different way I can learn it. It was

unnatural to like learn discipline through a class?! I mean, I learned discipline from my

parents!

Although Deshawn exhibited the willingness to protest when wronged, his belief that

conflict can always be worked out never waivers, according to him:

Impasse? I still can't see that happening. I never see that happening, if you *try* to

understand. You might agree to disagree…and that might be your compromise. You

might say like this is not working…we need to work together…that's your compromise.

So, at that point, there's no more conflict. And by *not* working together, there is no

conflict.

I asked Deshawn to provide a color metaphor for his high school experience. He chose white.

He explains:

um I think the color was white…White…I've always understood the color of white

as being like the absence of color…right…and it's almost like a *blank canvas*…It was

like…any experience can be whatever you make of it…yea that's why I picked white.

FIGURE 5.3 WHITE CANVAS

I also asked him for a sound that represents his experience in high school. Deshawn

offered this response: "Sound…um personally I don't want to sound like I got the big head…but

like a round of applause…Because it's just like—as far as school, I did it! I graduated. So, I

think I came out pretty well… standing ovation, because I got out the hood."

Phase 4--(Experience Is the Best Teacher) --Reimagine the Experience as a Coming of Age, Life Lesson Learning Opportunity

Deshawn realized, the more that *unnecessary* conflict is avoided, the more comfortable

the path seems to be. As a seasoned student, Deshawn's education included lessons learned about

his personal tendencies when confronted with real life situations as well as learning class content. One that he carries over into his post high school experiences is his commitment to direct communication as the best way to mitigate conflict. Being vigilant about coming to an understanding is always a priority, and a wiser solution than that of vigilantly seeking and sustaining conflict, according to Deshawn:

> You know…It ain't no point—yea! It's no point in arguing and fighting about certain things—especially like…and I read this quote…it was…well it wasn't even a quote, it was just some advice…and it was just saying like before you get angry about anything, will this matter in about ten minutes?

Because of his high school experiences where, from the beginning, his approach to navigating school included strategically disarming conflict by creating friendships, Deshawn has maintained a profound respect for the idea that developing and sustaining a culture of friendly relations with peers and faculty creates familial bonds that humanize the space. This sensibility shows up even in moments of conflict. Although Deshawn has stood his ground whenever his individuality was threatened Deshawn has never lost sight of the import of resolving differences whenever possible. In his daily life, after high school, he still approaches conflict the same, consistently representing the attitude that "we might as well compromise because I'm not fighting you, but I'm not giving in either":

> Yea, I just try to—try my best to compromise—but it's like, just meet me half way because I'm not trying to fight with you. So, the whole thing about it is like, we can work it out. I always believe any situation can be worked out with some help from communication… cause *I'm* not gone give in either!

Omari ("FAISE")

Phase 1--(I'll Figure It Out Phase) Trial and Error as a Pre-Strategy

> *In a sense, it put me so many leagues ahead…not even just the compound…but I was listening to the teachings…I could hear certain things…cause I was the child that, when all the other children were running around playing, I was with the adults… --Omari*
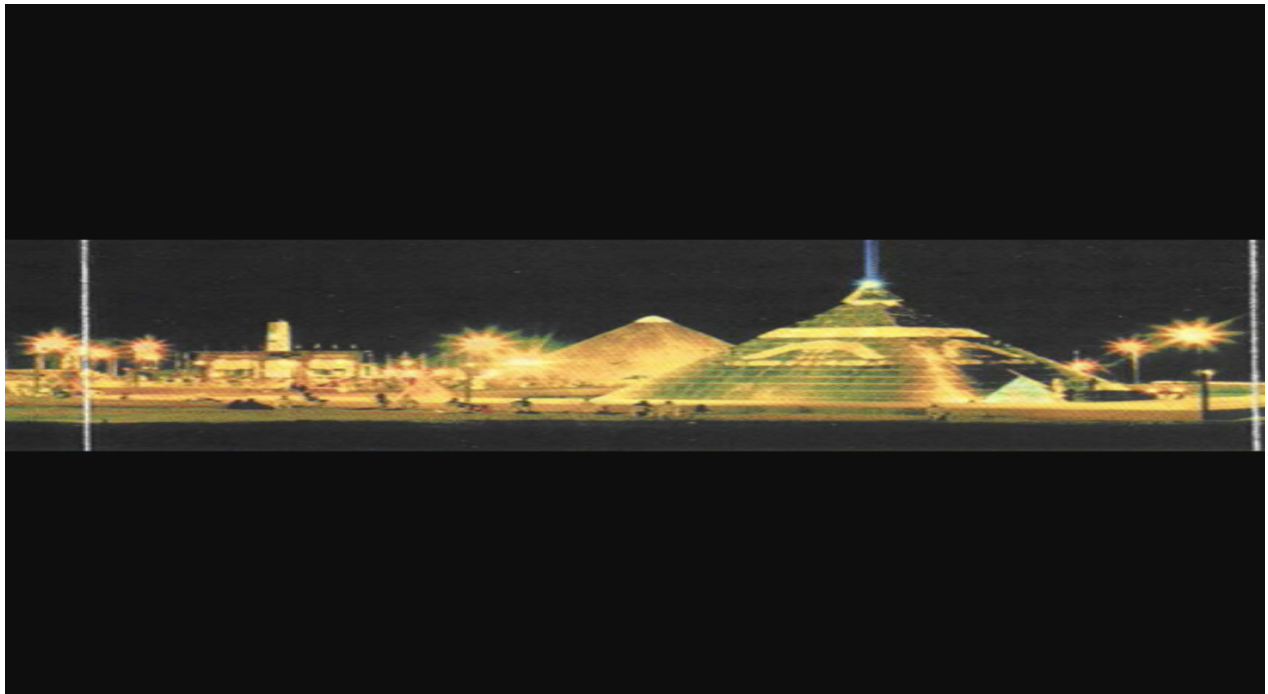

FIGURE 5.4 NUWAUBIAN COMPOUND

Faise entered high school with a strong sense of self, having been raised on the above pictured compound, as a member of the Nuwaubian Nation and exposed to the teachings of Dr. Malachi Z. York, its leader, who emphasized the use of sound and right reasoning towards community and nation building pursuits, premised on belief in the notion that blackness is divine. With such a developed sense of self upon entering high school, Omari was already committed to staying true, to what he perceived to be, his character: "And we all were raised on the doctrine…we all were raised on right knowledge…sound—right reasoning …and I never dropped it. I could never drop it…"

As an already highly skilled hip hop artist, with plans to enter the music business, and as a student entering high school, Omari would always treat his integrity as a non-negotiable item whenever threatened by the expectation to blindly obey authority. He briefly refers to a moment during his high school experience, where he was propositioned and turned down an offer to enter a rap contest on the school's behalf in order to win the top prize, which was some cash and being granted international marketing exposure for himself and the school:

And its' not true when people tell you—you gotta play the industry game to get in…I don't think that's a fact—I think that's an easy way out cause I could have done that—it could have been an easy way out…but it---which was more fruitful?…the route that I took, that was actually *myself*…and I didn't have to assassinate my own character just to put me in front of the eyes of the people…at the end of the day they weren't receiving the real me…

I quote Omari in full as he further details his experience:

They said we got this prompt for you…all you do is rap the prompt, you travel…you battle…and then you win the competition for some-odd dollars and coverage on an international stage---everything! So…the prompt was, write about someone who has inspired you in history… I said Dr. Malachi Z. York, hands down. I wrote my heart out…I'm like yea I got this. they loved it—I knew I had em…they come back to me the next day…actually a teacher came back to me the next day and said hey, they loved your piece, they were just curious if you would choose another person… I said if I'm not doing Dr. York then I'm not doing it! That's the point when the teacher pulled me aside and said look, you're walking away from a big opportunity…I said that's fine…I'll walk away from a million more…but you asking me to tell you about who really inspired

me—anything else you gonna get out of me talking about any other guys---you won't get the same energy…because I'm not inspired! So, that just showed me who I'm actually working with—what I actually stand for…and why I should continue to stand for it…because I didn't see any justice in that ---I literally kept thinking, like that's not fair! Teachers…they were saying…we *can't* on APS's behalf…we can't represent this man…the words were "risk it"— "*we can't risk it*!" I was like…what is the actual risk?!! What are you actually saying to me?!

Omari, even without an experientially based plan of navigating high school, was already convicted about standing firm on his principles, while being mindful of the practical necessity of doing whatever it takes to persevere and make it through to the end: "There are rewards for it in the long run---like even in the bible, you know…to use it as a reference—you know they say the meek will inherit the Earth…you know there are rewards...you know…for standing firm…" Omari sums up his attitude prior to going into the high-school experience when, in his own words, he exclaims, "So that's my truth! I can't break. I have to bend and bend, you know, but I can't break…figure out how I can…I have to make it!"

Phase 2--(Peep Game Phase)-Gain New Experiential Knowledge

Omari begins to get a feel for the culture of school and observes what appears to him as an overemphasis being placed on *success* itself. He feels that this is an impediment to people's ability to express genuine love in the space:

Ok! Well…I see it as…the thing that is stopping everybody man…um…from realizing *true* love… the true reason for existence…the true reason for…you know…hugging somebody…talking to somebody…teaching someone…learning from someone…because everyone has their mind on *success*…

Faise explains further:

…the concept…what is success man?!! Who created that? Who created that concept?!

That's their—cause you born here saying I want to be successful! Successful at what?!

What is success? Success is *also* systemic and when people realize *that*…the *success* of

conquering countries…you know…or the *success* of gentrification…

Faise is passionate when he expresses his beliefs. At this point in his experience, starting

to sense that being passionate while voicing critical thoughts about the content being taught was

frowned upon, he developed the attitude that "they just want you to obey and show no emotion:"

The main thing is…they don't want you to be emotional…the same way the people that

you work for in the work place or the work field…let's say you working for Wal

Mart…they don't want you to have an opinion about anything…they want you to throw

on, you know, your uniform ….and they want you to do *exactly* what they're telling you

to do…and anybody giving them questions or feedback…they take caution to that

because you're *challenging* something.

As an outspoken and opinionated student Omari began to see that teachers were impacted

by his presence. He noticed that his voice was often being marginalized and literally

overpowered when he wanted to express a viewpoint, so rather than resist and add to the tension,

Omari would respectfully yield to the teacher's authority. He describes the experience:

"the teacher is pretty much, overpowering you…and they use everything that they can to make

sure what you're saying isn't heard…and in those cases, man…I let em speak…" Omari wanted

to be respectful, but he was also committed to being honest about, what he knew to be, historical

facts that were being overlooked in classroom discussions. He felt challenged by his desire to

remain honest, realizing that it made teachers uncomfortable and brought awkwardness to the classroom:

> Its challenging because after a while…man you can be dope—you can be intelligent— you can be smart…after a while, somebody is going to hate it! Somebody is going to feel it and its going to be friction…you know…and I ran into that…I ran into that a few times…It wasn't so much with the staff…the staff I had no problem with…there would be times where I was asked to answer a question and I answered it honestly…and it started a…you know…a debate…amongst the teacher…. or amongst the students…

He was beginning to see elements of potential pushback for displaying a tendency to think critically. Omari perceived that teachers saw him as a threat:

> *You Lion kings wanna catch the truth, then you have to MU-Faaassa!! –FAISE ONE*

> They take caution to that because you're challenging something…and its showing them that you have your own mind…you have your own direction…and 'I don't need this, this is intimidating' …they look at it as a threat to what they're doing…

Perhaps the biggest observation, at this point in his experience, was the idea that "you run into friction whenever you challenge something systemic." Faise also expresses the belief, that all profit motivated entities, from the public-school system to the recording industry, are components of the same corporate *machine*/system that controls our daily human experience:

> Nobody willingly gave up their food—nobody willingly gave up their women as prizes…I'm like what is this?! You know…so…it reaches over into school cause you--- you run into a whole lot of friction…especially if you challenge anything systemic...you gonna run into the friction…of the…it's a machine!…it's not Walgreens…it's not

CBS…it's not APS… it's not the school system…it's not Columbia Records...it's *the machine*….that says...we gotta keep generating money…the whole thing is *money*…the news channel is money…the UFC channel is money…the football channel was money…all of it is money!...So…if you challenging anything that has to do with money…that machine has an energy behind it---the batteries behind it…or people behind it…that's gonna try to shadow you out! And in shadowing you out, they hope to create more batteries--Or more people that they can use…to empower it—*the machine.*

Phase 3--(New Attitude Phase)—Application of New Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

As Faise progressed in his school experience, he sought to create a space within the school that would facilitate freedom to express individuality and honest exchanges amongst peers, on any issue presented. His solution was the creation of an organization that represented solidarity around preserving the right to know facts that weren't being taught in school on a range of subjects, including history. Faise explains, in his own words, how he started the Pharaoh Clan organization based on a need for a free philosophical space within which to dialogue with his peers who had begun to inundate him with questions:

I want you to tell me more about this! Or, yo man…I got a real question for you… so if this, then… won't you tell me about this and this—and I can answer it...but I started realizing I was having a whole lot of, in between classes conversations with guys…at lunch—people outside in the courtyard…in front of the school— and I'm like yo, I need to have a class…I might as well…And that way, it's organized. They can come…they can talk to me…and they don't have to worry about feeling like its gonna turn into this all-out debate---I would listen to them—it became about anything man… they weren't always asking me about esoteric knowledge—sometimes they were asking

about situations going on right in front of their houses—in front of their doors…I also

made sure that if I didn't know I would tell them…I don't know…I can get back to

you…or I can give you some information that will get you closer…

As a high school student, the school I attended in Brockton, Massachusetts had a total

enrollment of six thousand plus, students. My graduating class was roughly two thousand,

with over half being of African descent. With the emergence of conscious rap, my peer group

would discuss a range of issues, including rap lyrics, Black history, and the state of Black

America, every day, in the lunch room. We realized there were no electives that reflected our

culture that would provide structured spaces, within school, for us to have the types of

conversations in which we were engaging. We did something about it. We felt that the school

itself should provide more cultural content options like those in which we were interested.

After toggling back and forth with the administration, we were able to establish an "Afro-

American Club" within the school structure, hold regular meetings where pertinent issues of

the day along with various texts by Black authors were collectively read and discussed, and

coordinate fundraising events. Like Faise, we provided a much-needed space for sharing ideas

pertaining to our identities as Black youth, that was being ignored by the school. We both

actively brought a student-organized, criticality to the school that, in effect, impacted its

cultural dynamic.

For Omari, creating such an organization that addressed a true need amongst his peers,

regarding identity development and expression, was at once about creating an in-school comfort

zone and challenging himself to actively change the dynamic of campus:

Man, I changed the dynamic of the campus—but the way I changed it…was creating people… or instilling within people…the need or the will to change something! And I couldn't have done it by myself…it was the whole Clan…that's what I kept telling them—'yo I'm not your leader…I'm your *demonstrator*, but I'm not your *leader*! At the end of the day, you all are going to be the leader—it's to the point that when I leave, ya'll still can meet and *trust* each other and talk…a lot of times, I would let them talk amongst themselves at the meetings and I'd interject, you know…accordingly.

Omari offered the following explanation for the picture he chose to be a metaphor that summed up his high school experience. It illustrates his very developed sense of self and mission, and provides a basis to appreciate his struggle to maintain a critical, but service based identity, in the face of a structure that prefers and emphasizes pure obedience:

"Yea I was careful when I chose that picture…if you can see it's a picture…the guy in the middle, which would represent me… Although it *seems* like they're praising and worshipping him…and he's just *up* there…and he's just this all-powerful God, floating…you know…but if you look at his hands, he's *reaching out*…"

FIGURE 5.5 REACHING OUT

Phase 4--(Experience Is the Best Teacher) --Reimagine the Experience as a Coming of Age, Life Lesson Learning Opportunity

Omari, at this stage of his experience, had a definite perspective as to what the high school experience provided him, regarding assets he discovered that may help him going forward in "the real world":

So…I feel like my high school experience was a direct representation of what I was capable of doing in the real world…which was getting in…finding out what I needed to do…*peeping* the whole scene and ah…actually climbing to the top…in a way, you know…that *I* was comfortable with…that I didn't have to sacrifice my character.

Upon reflecting on the import of his experience, Faise always comes back to growth, in general, as the key element in his experience as a person coming of age in high school and in real life. I asked Faise to provide a color metaphor for his experience. He chose white to represent the concept of, as he put it, "darkness going into light…not knowing into knowing." He continues about what white symbolizes to him as the color metaphor representing his tenure in high school:

From peaceful…going into chaos…cause it's going to be out of your comfort zone…you're not going to be comfortable to grow! You know, its gonna hurt…it's like the butterfly…she has to bleed, you know…to spread beautiful colors on the wings…If it's admitted, when we say, *let there be light*…you're upsetting something…upsetting peace and disturbing it…But it's a little deeper, you know…just saying that I'm aware that what I'm doing and what I *will* be doing in the future, is a strong, dignified mission…but it's only to *serve* certain things that are peaceful…and I could see that, inside the schools, when the teacher would be uneasy when I would bring light to, or

enlighten the class. The teacher was uneasy, you know, because the teacher was at peace with *them* being at peace…

I also asked Omari to sum up his entire experience with just one sound. His sound, a reflection of his desire to *always* grow from situation to situation, was selected in alignment with his previously expressed rationale that white represented the light of change. After reflecting on what he said about the color white, he offered his sound metaphor, saying, "you know, that's *change* and *that* sound is a groan!"

Accepting experience as a teacher strengthened Omari's resolve to *wisely* navigate what he perceived to be, corporate/industry spaces. According to Faise, as long as there is a realistic understanding about the money-first nature of "industry," or what he refers to as "the machine," (which includes *school* and the rap industry) then developing a strategy that allows for participation without sacrificing integrity, is possible:

> You forced to say look…although you want *this* to be true…we get that and everything…this is about money! And it's crazy…cause you don't want it to be about money…and then you turn around and say damn…this is the devils industry…it's always going to be about money and sometimes that comes at the extent of people's lives…at the expense of people's well-being…at the expense of people's lives…but it's gonna be the money…And you have to face yourself and say, ok…this is the industry I'm in…how do I bend but without breaking?

As Omari goes forward, drawing from his high school experiences, he is mindful about the balance he must always seek on his life-long quest to "make it," while seeking to forge cultural spaces that promote growth *within* spaces that only reward *success*. I asked Omari, if he

could choose one song to represent his high school experience, what would it be? He quickly

replied:

> It's the…" Wake Up Everybody" …Yea….no more backward thinking, time for thinking
>
> ahead…the world has changed so very much, from what it used to be, you know what
>
> I'm saying?!…We have war and poverty…you know…people don't know, but Dr.
>
> Malachi Z. York wrote that song.

Wake up all the teachers, time to teach a new way… –Harold Melvin and the Bluenotes

The above experiences will now be examined against two tenets of Critical Race Theory

including Whiteness as Property and Interest Convergence. The following will include an

analysis of specific events from each student's experience that speaks to the extent to which

these impediments and mechanisms of racialized control existed while they navigated high-

school.

Whiteness as Property and Interest Convergence—Meaning and Context

Whiteness as Property

As mentioned previously, the manner in which *possession* is treated by those in authority,

relative to those who aren't, can serve as an indicator for the presence of Whiteness functioning

as property. More specifically, the rule of first possession and whether or not it is upheld or

ignored, is a sure barometer for the extent to which whiteness is objectifying non-whiteness in a

relationship between the two.

Harris (1993), refers to the plight of the Indians to highlight the manner in which

possession plays out when *whiteness as property* is a factor. She reminds us that despite the fact

that the Indians were in America before the Europeans, "their racial and cultural otherness

allowed this fact to be reinterpreted and ultimately erased as a basis for asserting rights in the

land" (p. 1721). Harris adds, that because the land was left in its natural state, it was considered a *waste land*, and thus "the appropriate object of settlement and appropriation" (p. 1722). This interpretation of the first right of possession, renders all non-white ideas of the basic right to possess, untrue, and safely ignorable.

In the case of the student participants, much like the Indians spoken of by Harris (1993), student ideas of possession, from self-identity to broader notions, such as "success" itself, were expressly deemed "not true" by the rule based actions of the white authority governing their local school space. Just as Indian forms of possession were considered to be "ambiguous and unclear" (p.1722), legitimizing white claims of possession, the black student participants also suffered the ignorance and erasure of their first possession rights in school spaces on a variety of fronts. Each of the following exemplifies the presence of Whiteness as Property, as gleaned through the school's treatment of the students' first possession rights.

Interest Convergence

Derrick Bell (1995), offers this definition of interest convergence when he states, "The theory of interest convergence provides: The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p.22). Bell also points out by using the *Brown v. Board of Education decision*, that legislation does not necessarily ensure equality or justice. As is typically the case, in moments when black interests converge with white interests, after the utility of the convergence is depleted for whites, Blacks are left worse off than before. Bell (1996) refers to the sentiment of Judge Carter in regard to the *Brown* case, as conveying the commonly held perception of many Blacks. He uses Carter's words, who describes the case as having "transformed blacks from beggars pleading for decent treatment to

citizens demanding equal treatment under the law as their constitutionally recognized right"
(p.20).

Judge Carter's sentiment, according to Bell (1996), reflects the shortcomings inherently
contained in interest convergence scenarios with whites. He points out that Black expectations
are rooted in faith that legislation in fact equals material equality with whites. Blacks, according
to Bell (1996) embrace a position that reflects what he calls racial idealism instead of racial
realism. It is this racial idealism as it relates to the expectations of race neutrality blacks place on
educational environments, that facilitates the despair which typically accompanies the realization
that equality is not forthcoming as a result of the convergence. Bell (1996) reminds us of the
reality that "racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance," despite original
idealistic perceptions that an interest convergence with whites represents assured mutually
beneficial outcomes for both parties involved. The following student examples express the racial
realism underpinning their seemingly converging interests with school.

Whiteness as Property--Analysis

Jerquan

> I think about it G, cause that's slightly like being in the Army! You feeding people the
> wrong information and you leading them down this pathway, just like everybody
> else…and at the end it's no win…because once you on the path to happiness, whose
> happiness, is it?

The above quote illuminates the hegemonic tendencies inherent in the racist formulation
governing possession, that, according to Harris (1993) embeds white privilege into the definition
of property. Jerquan expresses feeling like his educational context was essentially an assembly
line where *people* were converted into products through a process of indoctrination designed to

override the student's vision of "future-self" and replace it with the structure's vision *for* the student. Further, built into the very structure of the replacement vision of "self," is a non-negotiable acceptance of what happiness should be, according to the dictates of such a prescribed self.

Jerquan's reflective question, "because once you on the path to happiness, whose happiness, is it," points to an instinctive awareness that possession of his natural identity was not considered fit for true possession, justifying whiteness' structural design that redefines and redirects black students to a life path more amenable to whiteness' vision of what a black male student is. In other words, Jerquan believed and felt that agreeing to undergo the schooling process is to be structurally and undemocratically redefined in a manner that blurs the ability to distinguish personal goals (i.e. happiness) from structural expectations, in effect making them appear as one in the same.

In this scenario, in so far as Jerquan pointed out, personal happiness can easily be conflated with the feeling generated from successfully obeying the dictates of the structure. Through the indoctrination that comes from participating in a system where only whiteness has the power of possession, the concept of happiness for its black subjects would essentially be reduced to their ability to successfully obey. In Jerquan's case, his feelings of being the object of whiteness as property as it camaflouges itself with the race neutral veneer of *public schooling*, are founded. Thus, the "path to happiness" and the notion of "happiness" itself, referred to by Jerquan, are all fabrications prescribed by whiteness for non-whites. In this case, the very concept of happiness is called into question by Jerquan as something that he may never *truly possess* as a non-white, navigating whiteness.

Deshawn

Well of course, the behavior is a thing…well, they want to get you in a uniform…maybe that stifled a lot of people's creativity…So you're out of uniform, they'll suspend you. They'll send you home if you walk in, without a uniform.

The above excerpt by Deshawn captures possession from a few different angles, relative to whiteness as property. Harris (1993) posits that as one of the exclusive rights of property use, possession embraces the absolute right to exclude. She adds that this right to *exclude* "non-whites" was the central principle upon which white identity was based, rather than any inherent unifying characteristic. As mentioned previously, Harris' (1993) depiction of the Indians as falling victim to the erasure of their ability to truly possess their property, since it was kept in a natural state and considered waste, parallels Deshawn's experience, where not being in compliance with the uniform policy means a forfeiture of access into school.

The fact that he must don a uniform to enter is an extreme and blatant statement of possession that implies this is how one should look as a student. Tied to that implication is one that suggests coming to school to learn, while appearing as one's natural self is unacceptable for this space. Access being granted or denied on the basis of whether or not the student is wearing their uniform, makes the uniform an extension of whiteness (like literal skin), that when donned, grants access to and makes the wearer an acceptable object of whiteness. When in a natural state, not only is he denied access strictly based on lack of wearing a uniform, without regard to his academic needs or the fact that he showed up to school, but *according to* the rules, which stigmatize him as a deviant, legitimizing the further use of corrective punishment.

He is only appropriate for access when by virtue of being obedient, he represents the brand (Uniform). The uniform acts as a proxy for obedience to whiteness. The power to exclude

from the school space as punishment for not coming in uniform, at once accomplishes further entrenchment of the white representation of blackness. Having been undemocratically subjected to a uniform policy against the threat of punitive consequences, Deshawn experienced a type of objectification mirroring the manner in which whiteness as property displays ownership through its absolute right to exclude and accept.

Omari

> So…the prompt was, write about someone who has inspired you in history… I said Dr. Malachi Z. York, hands down. I wrote my heart out…I'm like yea I got this. they loved it—I knew I had em…they come back to me the next day…actually a teacher came back to me the next day and said hey, they loved your piece, they were just curious if you would choose another person… I said if I'm not doing Dr. York then I'm not doing it!... Teachers…they were saying…we *can't* on APS's behalf…we can't represent this man…the words were "risk it"— "*we can't risk it*!"

In this experience, expressed by Omari, his very right of first possession, as it relates to who he can be inspired by is reinterpreted as the right to be inspired by someone approved by whiteness. "They loved your piece, they were just curious if you could choose another person." The implication here is that Omari's talent can benefit the school by winning the contest, however they cannot let him use their platform to express who truly inspires him and why, since his selection doesn't fit their profile of one who possesses acceptable inspirational attributes for young Black males. In comparison to the absolute right of APS (Whiteness) to exclude, by exerting its privilege as the true possessor of what qualifies as an acceptable inspiration for black students, Omari's individual sensibilities were assumed to be expendable and disposable. They were considered to be possessions that weren't true, and as such could be easily and safely

ignored (Harris, 1993). Further, it can be said that the administrator who asked Omari to change his inspiration, stood to lose her access to the protection afforded by whiteness while she acted as a Black proxy, serving as a quality control enforcer, and vetting acceptable Blackness on behalf of whiteness.

Interest Convergence--Analysis

Jerquan

School, as a credit issuing institution/business is a venue that clearly represents converging interests between those who attend and those who control or own the institution. As a student matriculating through the school process, Jerquan's primary objective is acquiring his diploma, a certification that impacts employability. As an owner, students being present in the space insures that school operated monetary interests are sustained. Jerquan, as an adolescent coming of age as a student and as a person in an educational context, expected the high school experience to be based on the ideal of student centeredness and reflective of an ethic of caring about the overall development and well-being of the student. As the undemocratic and "culture-neutral" reality of the context began to replace his idealistic expectations, Jerquan signals, through his picture metaphor, a burgeoning understanding that school does not necessarily have concern for the people who attend more than how many students are in the seats: "...the only thing that's missing in this picture is *love*!! And that should be in the middle…"

He further expresses the despair that according to Bell, (1996) is typically connected with the asymmetric convergence of interests between blacks and whites. Jerquan illustrates experiencing an impersonal reality that not only vastly differs from his cultural ideal of what school should be, but one that unapologetically sacrifices his interests via the imposition of the owners' ideals and interests: "They just teach us out the book G---they have they head in a book

the whole time…and they want us to have our head in the book the whole—we don't even look the teacher in the *eye* half of the class period."

Jerquan reaches a point of explicit acknowledgment and consideration of the implications behind his converging interest with whiteness, via the school system. He expresses the perception that although school completion is a "route out" of "the hood," to a more prosperous quality of life, the costs to achieve such perceived benefits entails that he compromises his expectations of cultural equity and accept the school's market place interests (uniformity, predictability, accountability, efficiency, etc.):

> Yea…I mean I know that's one of my routes out!...It will make you sit back and think a little bit…I mean...I don't… wouldn't say turn your back on who you are, but…it's a lot of things that determine who you are…just like I said, but then you become the image that *somebody else* want you to portray…And not the image that *you* want to portray…But at the same time, I mean…when money get involved, a nigga still got to survive out there…

The challenge for Jerquan becomes *how* to conform/converge and protect his interests, despite the awareness that the marketplace systematically controls and shapes what is allowed to constitute the person/human resource emerging into society after *utilizing* school as the "route out." These market place characteristics create a school culture based on whiteness, that is antithetical to the empathy and human connection sought by Jerquan, but amenable to divergent and contrasting qualities including isolation, exclusion and separation.

Deshawn

For Deshawn, the need to go to school, graduate and earn a diploma in exchange for a better chance on the job market after graduating and the fiscal necessity of schools to fill all the

seats in order to maximize funds received from the state, represents a convergence of interests. Deshawn, like Jerquan, approached his quest to earn a diploma with an idealized expectation that in return for his commitment, good attendance and academic performance, school would reflect an overall student-centered culture of compassion and nurturing. However, Deshawn, also similar to Jerquan, speaks from a newly acquired realization that school operates from an agenda of control, predictability and absolute obedience to its system of rules more than an ethic that cares for the personal well-being of the student.

The lack of compassion for and criminalization of those considered out of compliance, regardless of degree, demonstrates even further to Deshawn that the school's interests not only trump his own, but mandate his wholehearted acceptance of such an asymmetrical power arrangement. He illustrates such sentiment in the following example as he refers to the administration's decoding of what message they receive when a student shows up to school without being properly uniformed. He also refers to the blatant capacity of such a system to subjectively eradicate/sacrifice the interests of students it deems deserving: "They see it as somebody defying the system. That's why they try to use the system as their…umm…what's the word… reason for---justification! –that's the word…they use the system as their justification to punish the person or label them as a trouble maker."

This systemic power of whiteness often neutralizes the black student through marginalization, compromising his chances to protect and fulfill his ideal interests (receipt of a diploma). Deshawn further illustrates the asymmetry in power that enhances the system's ability to sustain such a culture of inequity, in interest convergence scenarios, at the expense of black personal well-being: "…but they have all the leverage as far as the system goes. And that's where the trouble comes in…and that's why they almost—it could make or break a

person…depending on how bad the fight, between their personality clashing with the system…"
Zero tolerance cultures connote the type of hyper security that comes out of a culture of distrust and disconnection. These characteristics also reflect a school culture, that in reality is more concerned with obedience and control of assets, and less concerned with an ideal that includes nurturing environments—*love*. Such a culture and its attendant emphasis on coercively inspired performance and obedience, is a direct result of whiteness.

Omari

I literally kept thinking, like that's not fair! Teachers…they were saying…we *can't* on APS's behalf…we can't represent this man…the words were "risk it"— "*we can't risk it*!" I was like…what is the actual risk?!! What are you actually saying to me?!

The above quote is in reference to Omari's choice to represent Dr. Malachi York as his inspirational figure for an APS sanctioned program, where a cash prize and resources toward marketing and promotion could be won by the best participant. He was denied his choice based on the rationale expressed in the above quote. What initially began as a convergence of interests on the basis of Omari's opportunity to be exposed to a wide audience for his rap skills and the school's expectation that Omari would win, which would result in free publicity for the school and other benefits from Omari's talent as a rapper. When he chose not to participate and stand his ground, it became obvious that the school, in an attempt to maintain its politically correct behavior and maintain its financial security with APS, prioritized their interests over his. His interests were simply sacrificed the instant they were observed as being a catalyst that could create a divergence of interests.

Below, Omari speaks to existing within an educational culture defined by its adherence to uniformity as a way for the structure to mitigate "black naturalness" in the space. Once again, the

coercive element that penalizes non-obedience, also creates physical separation by "shadowing out" transgressors who challenge authority, while justifying the further use of force to create more and more rule based separation. Omari speaks with a clarity that connotes an understanding based on a racial realism rather than idealism (Bell, 1996). He understands his subordinate status as a black male in a system that is not black and the costs associated with maintaining rather than compromising a position of black strength:

> if you're challenging *anything* that has to do with money…that machine has an energy behind it---the batteries behind it…or people behind it…that's gonna try to shadow you out! And in shadowing you out, they hope to create more batteries--Or more people that they can use…to empower it—*the machine*. They don't want you to have an opinion about anything…they want you to throw on, you know, your uniform ….and they want you to do *exactly* what they're telling you to do…and anybody giving them questions or feedback…they take caution to that because you're *challenging* something.

Omari demonstrates, in the above quote, that he possesses an understanding of the built-in inequity of the racialized power dynamic contained within such interest convergence scenarios. According to Bell, (1996) this realism based understanding is what will ultimately allow the overwhelming impact of whiteness' racialized interests to be managed by blackness in a manner that is less damaging and more amenable to sustainable strategies for maximum comfort, despite the inherent inequity existing within it (Bell, 1996).

Chapter 6: Commonalities and Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to explore how professional black male recording artists and black male students deal with the way unequal power works in the recording industry and the classroom. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

> 1. How do contemporary professional Black male recording artists navigate the recording industry's tendency to restrain their personal "voice" and creative agency in the process of commodifying their talents?
>
> 2. How do Black male youth navigate classroom spaces to maintain their personal "voice" and creative agency?
>
> 3. Are there similarities between the experiences of Black male artists and Black males in the education system and how they navigate the power differential they face?

This chapter addresses the third research question and contains 3 sections. The *first* section presents the participant's "sound worlds," including their rationales for selecting the metaphors that creatively and symbolically embodied their experiences. The *second* section presents the overall commonalities experienced between the artists and the students, as gleaned by the researcher. A brief summary and analysis of some of the correlating themes present in their metaphorical choices will be presented. This section will also further define the four distinct phases that emerged from the data, in terms of their broader function and meaning as a significant, common aspect of their overall experiences. Further, the second section will include other thematic commonalities gleaned by the researcher, that occurred across both sets of experiences. Finally, participants' self-expressed similarities (Data Swap) will be analyzed in terms of how white power crosses those experiences and how they attempted to push back. The

third section presents a conclusion that speaks to the implications stemming from their expressed experiences as black males, in a music industry and school system controlled by whiteness.

6.1 Participant Sound Worlds

This research project utilizes an "arts based methodology." One of the primary features of this methodology is its use of "fugue." A fugue, for the purpose of this study, is an intertwining of themes and concepts such that their proximity elucidates deeper connections and layers of meaning. Such an abstract presentation device facilitates the illustration of the complexity inherent in this research, which seeks to understand how Black males navigate the asymmetric power dynamic contained within the music industry and the educational system. The following presentation of ideas represents an exhibition of the participant's stream of consciousness while reflecting on their navigational experiences.

The participants' self-selected symbols reveal the more nuanced but vital sensibilities embedded within their psyche, relative to how they navigated white power, within and across their respective experiences. In order to complete their sound worlds, the participants were asked to think of a word, color, sound, and a song, or something lyrical, that could each represent their entire experience as a student or as an artist. Finally, each participant's sound world culminates with their personal definition of "the can" metaphor that appears in the title of this research study. Let this section serve as an introduction into the participants' minds and natal convictions. It is also an invitation, through a fugue of sounds, words, colors, music, and pictures that capture their experiences, to observe and perhaps better understand their journeys from a completely authentic and artistic point of view.

Picture Metaphors
AKIL THE MC

(Image By: LAURIE COOPER)

FIGURE 6.1 CANT SPEAK
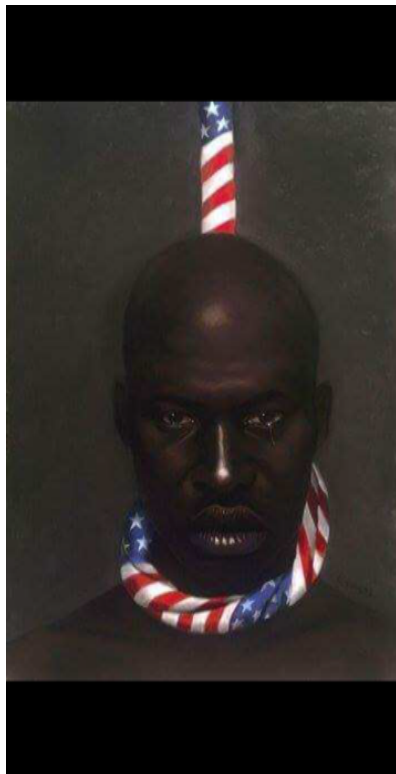
"…This is America cutting off our respiratory…our ability to breathe…In this country, were being choked by the standards that America stands by…represented by this flag …which is wrapped around this man's neck…and I feel like its wrapped around *all* of our necks within the society that we live in… like, *yo man*…this image right here is *us*! …in totality, man---it has been *no* justice…we have just been *choked—lynched*…we got lynched in a lot of different situations-dealing with music, being in the industry and, you know…marginalizing us…got this rope around our neck…you can't speak out…But, you know…we still here…I got the marks on my neck and shit so…"

(KIRK MCKOY / LOS ANGELES TIMES)

FIGURE 6.2 LOOK WHAT YOU CREATED

"…This is April 30, 1992… The day after the riots kicked off with the whole Rodney King thing in Los Angeles…I actually lived on 71st, like right around the corner from Florence and Normandy…so

I'm like, you know…watching this shit burn… it was a music store over there and we was like man…let's go get some equipment. As soon as we get there…I seen some spray paint and I'm like Ooooh! I said…I'm finna write something on the wall… I got spray paint and shit going on all around me…*burning* shit…and I'm like…Yea! *"Look what you created"*…I'm finna write *look what you created*…I'm thinking strategically, like—I want to *write something that's gone make a statement*. You know…to me, *it represents a time of struggle and a time of wanting change*. It just documents a particular time in my life…doing music and dealing with social issues. We wasn't even Jurassic Five then, but we was still doing music…look at Jurassic Five and *what we did*…look at what *you* created…you *created* this energy…"

TRACEY LEE

"*The **microphone** is a powerful tool! -- that represents…that's the centerpiece of what I do, you know what I'm saying…with that mic, as long as you know how to control…move the crowd…control the mic…control the crowd with the mic…then the microphone is the most powerful tool there is—that you could ever have…"

FIGURE 6.3 THE MIC

FIGURE 6.4 CONTRACT

"…You're not going to be approached by a label or think you're going to enter it—into *any* type of venture with a label, without a **contract**…if you're smart you wouldn't get into any type of business venture without a contract…but the contract itself …It doesn't just stop there…I mean, you can be signing your life away! You're free as an *artist*…When it comes to business, you're *not*

free…you're *restricted*, you know what I mean…its dotting the *I's* and crossing the *T's*."

DERIC "D-DOT" ANGELETTIE

"**…The picture with my moms…is the first one**…Aight, so…what it really boils down

to…growing up, it was just me and my mother…Umm, my father was a...you know…an addict!—Umm….an alcoholic---so he wasn't really around…So my mother ended up becoming a *doctor*…so…that's my inspiration of *why I get up in the morning-* --and what motivates me…*is* my moms!...Know what I mean…like…raising a child *by herself* in *Brooklyn*…Sacrificed *everything* for me…So whenever the music industry

FIGURE 6.5 D-DOT/MOM happened…and things happen in the business…the first person I

think about is my mother! How *she* would handle it…how she would come to me and *advise*

me."

"…**And the fam---all my girls obviously**…my mother told me when I was younger that I'm gonna have a great responsibility in life…and I always thought it was my business…my successes or something I started…and she was like… "*No*…raising women."

FIGURE 6.6 D-DOT/FAMILY That picture just reminds me of *a choice* that I

made…so that picture represents *my* sacrifice…It represents what *I gave up,* to enjoy this! And

this became more important to me—*this* became much more bigger than being a wealthy

bachelor."

"The first picture…I'm working with Jean Michele Basquiat…**It's the balance between God and law…**it's the balance between morals...it's actually…it's like life…the only thing that's missing in this picture is love!! And that should be in the middle… at the top of the picture there is a balance beam…and God and law is balancing our money… Let me break that down…God is you! God is you period!
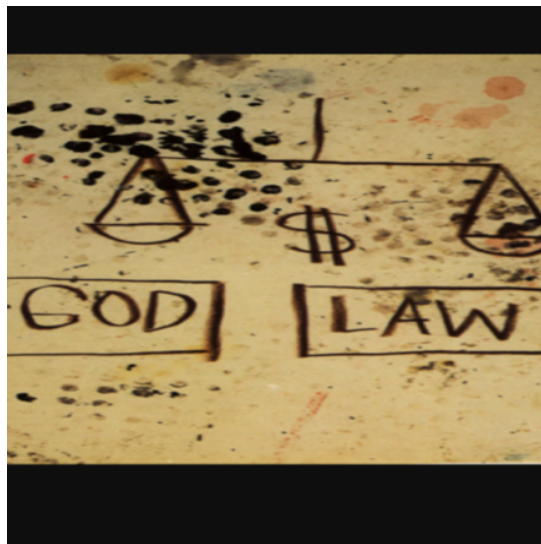
FIGURE 6.7 GOD AND LAW

 Law is…it's the outsider's world…What would you do for money? Do you become one with law, or do you remain yourself? Is it possible to do both?!"

FIGURE 6.8 STARRY NIGHTS

"I went for ***Starry Nights***…Vincent Van Gogh…This is life G…I pick life as a whole—I can't pick out one specific experience…Its just life as a whole…That's my mind in the middle…light…the world is dark…its certain spots of light…but we trying to get out, at the bottom…and these big dogs, they stay at the top…big dogs at the top! Thing about being at the top…they still not reaching the light. Only thing they can do is look down on *us*…Still not reaching the lights! That's what everybody is trying to get to…in this cold world…"

DESHAWN FLEMING

"So…**this is class** right here…you could notice...since I'm able to capture everything in front of me, that lets you know I'm already sitting in the *back of class*...Even though I'm sitting in the back, I'm still getting everything that I'm supposed to get out of this class…A lot of times you get that

FIGURE 6.9 CLASSROOM connotation of you sitting in the back—probably joking around, playing around…but not really paying attention…but I'm alert enough to know, even though I'm in the back, I can *still* get everything that I need out of the class—so basically even going through high school, I was able to sit *anywhere* in the classroom… and still being able to, pretty much, break that narrative of just sitting in the back –you just…you aint *bout* nothing…so that's pretty much the significance of this picture…"

"This is a picture of me and my boy Scott…his last semester in high school we were both at Georgia State…So it's almost like even…it still had that village kind of raising…village raising a child type thing…Me and Scott have been like sharpening each other for like years… And so, I **FIGURE 6.10 SCOTT/DESHAWN** think that's a part of my support system moving through high school."

OMARI "FAISE ONE" HARGROVE

(Image by: Dr. Malachi Z. York)

"…Are you familiar with those **Nuwaubian compounds**…those structures… see I was *there*…You know…Like I had the privilege of experiencing it… that's how it looks at night… that's when the magic happens…like…you see the
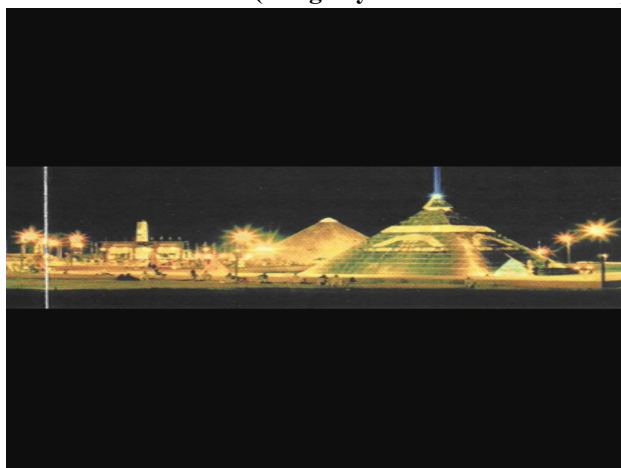
FIGURE 6.11 NUWAUBIAN COMPOUND

pyramids are glowing...the capstones are glowing…walking around there…you know…but you can imagine how much of an influence that had…I took in everything…And that resonated with me…I was able to see all the peace--I was able to see first-hand, the branches of the civil rights and conscious movements…And also see that what I willed to do, has been done! And to the caliber that I wanted to achieve it…They *took* the land actually when I turned four…you know, to see that be destroyed…it was demolished man…the demolition…"

FIGURE 6.12 REACHING OUT

"That one picture stood out to me…to say that even though I know I'm different—a lot of people…you know, some people would say I'm more advanced—I'm not the one that always says these types of things…But at the same time…why I even started that organization at the school by itself in the first place…was to help them raise up…and I wanted…that's why I was telling them hey, even though

I'm demonstrating this to you, I'm not necessarily your leader…You don't have to just follow me! I'm demonstrating to you that there's information available for you! —that's what that picture says to me…**I'm advanced…but it doesn't mean that they can't be**…"

Color Metaphors

AKIL THE MC

"**BLACK AND GREEN**…The green is prosperity--there's *always* hope within—I'm an optimistic person, so no matter what's going on, there will always be hope…no matter what's going on…The *Black*…the Black represents the turmoil…"

FIGURE 6.13 BLACK AND GREEN

TRACEY LEE

FIGURE 6.15 CHILD

FIGURE 6.14 CHAIN
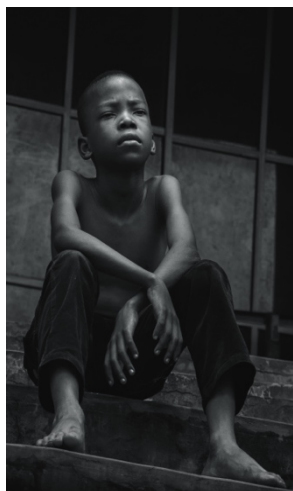
"**BLACK** is the color…Black *is* strength! Black is who I am. Black is who *you* are. Black is a *beautiful* color…*Black*… So you talking bout the *drum*, the color *Black* and the word *strength*…and those are the three things…not only that I would like to *think*, make up my persona…but also, in the music business, and me dealing with music *period*…those are the three symbols, if you will, that allowed me to move in the direction or create the foundation for myself, as an artist…for myself, as a person…for myself, as a *man*…and all of the above…"

DERIC "D-DOT" ANGELETTIE

"I'm always pro-Black…but, Black always…you know, obviously Black creates darkness sometimes…and I don't wanna seem like I'm *dark*…so I would probably say **EARTH TONE COLORS**—cause I'm for the people—so earth tone colors…I'm just- for the betterment, so I'd say like…***cream or beige***…Or something like that…because its *brightness* to it…but it represents…you know, it's *kinda* the culmination of the browns and the blacks…"

FIGURE 6.16 EARTH TONE

JERQUAN MADDOX

"I want to say **BLACK**… Cause without *Black*—it's like you say…it's the mother of all colors--without Black, there would be no—there would never be no *white*…there would be no light to shine on…but the same thing about the light shining—*it never completely gets all the darkness*…I mean…you always got outsiders hating…its *always* views and opinions that are overlooked…that actually *could* sometimes benefit us and make sense… But it's just overlooked so much, due to what the light is shed on…everybody's attention is what the *light is shed on…*"

FIGURE 6.17 CHESS PIECES

DESHAWN FLEMING

"I think the color was **WHITE**……I've always understood the color of white as being like the *absence* of color…right…and it's almost like a blank canvas…It was like…any experience can be whatever you make of it…"

FIGURE 6.18 WHITE CANVAS

OMARI "FAISE ONE" HARGROVE

"I chose **WHITE**! that color white…is the *let there be light*…in the fashion of…going from
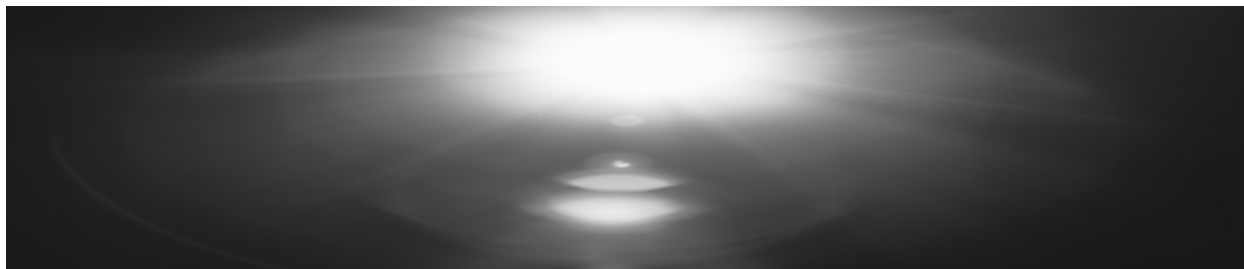
FIGURE 6.19 WHITE LIGHT

darkness…you know…to light…and I don't mean it to say…and this is a disclaimer…I don't

mean it to say that the *darkness* is necessarily a bad thing…but for me…sense of illusion…you

know…Darkness going into light—not knowing going into knowing…From peaceful…going

into chaos…cause it's going to be out of your comfort zone…you're not going to be

comfortable—to grow!"

Word Metaphors

AKIL THE MC

FIGURE 6.20 RESILIENCE

"Black people, period…are just resilient people---just being knocked down…just faced

with every day…you know, it's *always* some shit! And we still just get up and battle that

shit! and look back on that shit and be like… whatever! Just bring it on! Like, whatever!!

…the **RESILIENCE**—I think being in this industry tears you down... even though

everybody wants to be a star…but still! The resilient part…the resilience…"

TRACEY LEE

"STRENGTH"

DERIC "D-DOT" ANGELETTIE

"EVOLVING"

FIGURE 6.21 EVOLVING

"EVOLVING…Evolving…I'm only 49 about to be 50…so I'm still growing… I don't know everything. And I'm always meeting people…So…new people, new experiences, new times…I'm still breathing…So…I know this---I know that I haven't completed my cycle yet…"

JERQUAN MADDOX

"LIFE"

"For my word, Imma pick **LIFE**… it's like everybody is paying attention to everything else,

except life…in general...in the sense of…you becoming one with *yourself* and you becoming one

with your *soul*…and that way you can honestly begin to understand other people… It's like, people don't have that understanding of they self because they get so caught up in this *image*…like it's a big image—we gone make sure yall know certain aspects of what the government want

FIGURE 6.22 LIFE

to give us…so we can fall into working for somebody else…"

DESHAWN FLEMING

"EASYGOING"

FIGURE 6.23 EASYGOING

"…I think **EASYGOING** is one of those things where you see everything that's going on around

you, you gotta kind of not let stuff phase you…and to me that always came easy, so…that's one

of those things where life is just life."

OMARI "FAISE ONE" HARGROVE

FIGURE 6.24 SUCCESS

"The word I chose was **SUCCESS**… Ok! Well…I see it as…the thing that is stopping

everybody man…from realizing true love… you know…the true reason for existence…the true

reason for…you know…hugging somebody…talking to somebody…teaching

someone…learning from someone…because everyone has their mind on success…"

Sound Metaphors
AKIL THE MC
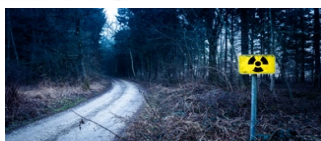
FIGURE 6.25 DANGER

"…That sound like, you know, ***SOMETHING IS FINNA HAPPEN***, but you don't know

what is going to happen— like those scary movie sounds…it's scary and you don't know

what's finna happen…you just never know what the fuck gone happen!"

TRACEY LEE

FIGURE 6.26 DRUM

"Ok, the sound is the ***DRUM***…that is the backbone for me when I am writing…I listen to

the drums first…I listen to the drum *pattern* first…you know what I'm saying…I fall in

love with the chords and I fall in love with the melodies, but I *always* listen to the drums

first. The beat of the drum gives me the *direction*…the beat of the drums, *to me*, is the most powerful part of a Hip Hop track…know what I'm saying…without the drums, *it's not Hip Hop!"*

DERIC "D-DOT" ANGELETTIE

FIGURE 6.27 GUN

"**THE STARTER GUN**…at the beginning of a race (makes gunshot sound) like wake up! That's what that symbolizes to me…like a shot---a clap—you know something that *wakes you up*—you know how somebody daydreaming and you clap—wake up! It wakes em up out of their…clap!--or they hear gunshots and it wakes you up out of your—yea…so like a shot or a clap…those are the two that I would say…It's almost like wake up! You know, everybody pay attention! Stay woke!

JERQUAN MADDOX

FIGURE 6.28 PISTOL

"I want to say a **GUNSHOT**! So intense… Its so intense… And it gets your blood flowing… And especially when you hear it for the first time…but after a while, you know, you kinda get used to it…And its *crazy* that you---I mean that's the thing that you trying to *avoid*…You think…but its people used to hearing gunshots."

DESHAWN FLEMING

FIGURE 6.29 APPLAUSE

"**ROUND OF APPLAUSE**…Because it's just…like, as far as school—like, I did it! I graduated! I think I came out pretty well… standing ovation, because I got out the hood…"

OMARI "FAISE ONE" HARGROVE

FIGURE 6.30 EXPLOSION

"You ever watched a movie and, let's see—it's a disaster movie…you know like…trains being thrown by tornados, type movie… when there's about to be a huge event about to happen like, you know, an explosion or…a tornado or something…being thrown in the movies…there is this slight groan…Yea! So, my word I chose is **GROAN**. That sound is just the sound of change man…groan is like the sound of something happening…some type of change happening…you know…if like you bend a pencil…you may not hear it, but…within that pencil…before it snaps, there's a groan…It's just letting you know that yo…I'm about to break!"

Song/Lyric Metaphors

AKIL THE MC

"Kendrick Lamar… **We Gone Be Alright**…"

Song Message: If God is with you, no matter what, you gone be alright!

TRACEY LEE

"**On the Edge…**number *one*…*that* song right *there*…that was a stage in my life when—it was a transitional point in my life! It was *after* I got outta Howard…and me pursuing a deal…and me kinda being in limbo! …I said…***Aint no fun--son its real out***

here--word to God, it's rough shit…stuck hunting for bucks--I'm stuck between a rock

and some concrete…—roaming the streets of DC for weeks---cause all I wanna do is

make beats--freak the rhymes-- so I gotta do whatever—I refuse to go back to Philly

until my shits together…but if it aint one thing it's another, kid--when it rains it pours,

I did--what I had to do, was run for cover and—think quick!"

DERIC "D-DOT" ANGELETTIE

*"*Roy Ayers…**We live in Brooklyn**…(singing) *We can make it baby … Yea*, the time is

now! That's what he says, the time is now…"

JERQUAN MADDOX

"**…**Ok I actually got a song called ***What's Life … --***sitting in the breeze—niggas talking

bout what they used to do--rolling up a blunt--the weed, never the usual--I'm *high*, but I

never look *down* on what *other* niggas do! Who am I to judge? I'm just another nigga

sinning too!"

"…***The Future*** doesn't exist without the present--time doesn't exist without a clock, how

can you measure a second…"

DESHAWN FLEMING

"I ended up choosing Wale's **"Love/Hate Thing."** And it's like…I mean…love can

build you up and it'll break you down…it's going to be stuff you *love* about it…stuff you

hate about it…and at the end of the day, it's all about what you *do* with it…"

OMARI "FAISE ONE" HARGROVE

"It's the…**Wake Up Everybody**… It says, wake up all the teachers, it's time to teach a

new way…So what you have to say…you know…cause *they're* the ones who's coming

up---the world is in *their* hands…*when you teach the children, teach them the very best*

you can!"

Theorizing About "The Can"

AKIL THE MC

"The can is a ***SOUL SNATCHER…A PRISON*** for our talents and output."

FIGURE 6.31 CAN

TRACEY LEE

"The *can* is the ***CONTROL/POWER* OVER ANOTHER ENTITY** or human being…we live in

an egomaniacal society, for the most part, where *control is king*…and usually control is

predicated by the *almighty dollar* in a capitalistic society…and generally *our* culture is *the*

commodity that *produces* the revenue stream…"   **FIGURE 6.32 CAN**

DERIC "D-DOT" ANGELETTIE

"The word that comes to mind is **"OPPORTUNITY."** The rationale is that culture has   an

opportunity to be canned--closed in…or opened to everyone, to see and experience. It's up to the

individual."
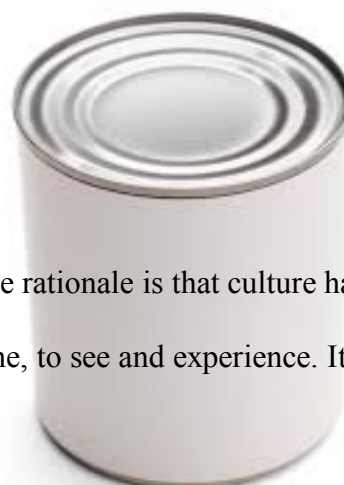
FIGURE 6.33 CAN

JERQUAN MADDOX

"**LOST LOVE** is the can our souls have been placed into. We are surrounded by love created

just for us directly… But that love you used to sit in has now been breached and you've been

added to other substances which began to thin the sauce of your soul. The more diluted you become, the love is lost. The feelings that you felt inside, they can begin to vanish. And the can is *no longer a can of Love*. It's just a can **FIGURE 6.34 CAN** now. How can you maintain love in a

tainted realm? You came from love but can't uphold it, because others feel you taste better with

seasoning and you start to feel the same, instead of remaining that love based entity. The love

was lost and so is the substance that occupied the space."

DESHAWN FLEMING

"As a student, I believe the can is a

CULMINATION OF AMPLIFIED

TRAITS. In a classroom, teachers,

whether naturally or due to the system,

filter out certain personality and/or

behavior traits that do not fit whatever

agenda *they* have, for what *they perceive*

FIGURE 6.35 CAN

your potential to be. I believe the common motive of a teacher is to take the best

personality traits of a student and use those to mold them into the best functional member

of society that they can…however, they suppress the qualities of the student that makes

them, THEM. From my standpoint, I understand that, in theory, the school system means

well, but their side effects of suppressing individual qualities can prove to be

detrimental."

OMARI "FAISE ONE" HARGROVE

This can, symbolizing **SUCCESS,** is and has always been, the rise and inevitable fall of,

not only so-called whites and so-called blacks of today's society, but also of all

humanity. Man strives. Once he strives, there will always be present, opposition. Where

opposition exists, so does a challenge. Challenges yield two contrasting possibilities;

Winner or Loser; Success or Failure; Up or Down. Man will extort. Man will sacrifice.

Man will wage war. Man will KILL to be successful. In that moment, in which one man

is in competition with another, there is nothing he won't do to prove to be successful.
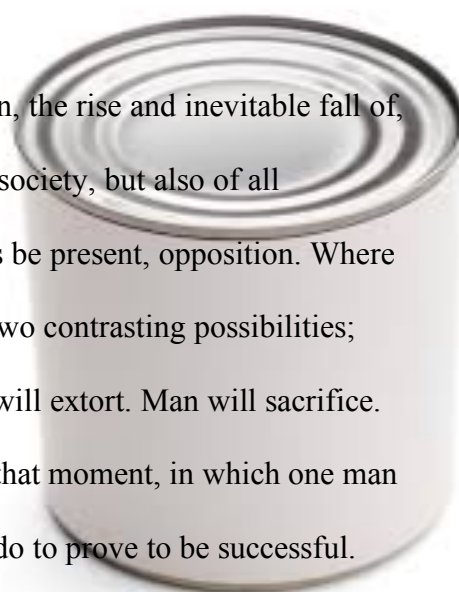
FIGURE 6. 36 CAN

6.2 Researcher Observed Commonalities

The participant's "soundworlds," when compared, offered several points of commonality and correlation. The picture metaphors provided by each participant highlighted two distinct themes. Akil's photo of the black man with an American flag around his neck shares a similar critical/radical sensibility in common with his "Look what you created," photo as well as Tracey Lee's picture of a microphone stylized to project the image of a "black power" fist gripping the microphone. These images also strongly stress their convictions regarding the freedom to use their voice as an equalizer or a counter to the power of whiteness to marginalize the reach of black narratives. In contrast to the race consciousness implied by Tracey Lee and Akil via their picture metaphors, D-Dot and Deshawn demonstrated a similar sensibility to their appreciation for the role played by their support systems. D-Dot's mom and daughters were the focal point of Angelettie's metaphors while Deshawn featured his best friend in much the same manner, revering the familial aspect created by the presence of his friend/support system in school spaces much like D-Dot's reverence of his mom's supportive presence while in industry spaces and situations.

Jerquan, with the Basquiat painting on morality and law and Omari's utilization of the black messianic figure, both exhibited similar deference to spirituality and morality as underlying notions of import, guiding their respective journeys. Both also highlighted a strong sensibility relative to their cautious attitude around the inherent authority contained in hierarchical relationships. Jerquan illustrates this through his rationale for choosing "Starry Nights," expressing that being on the bottom is a relative notion, since those on top don't share the true authority of being on top that stars possess, but only enjoy a vantage point that is *above* those on the bottom. Like Omari's demotion of the messianic figure who floats above the

masses, claiming that his elevation is not an exclusive right, Jerquan also places an element of questionability on the status quo's claim of exclusivity as *the* authority.

The color metaphors seemed to highlight even further the presence of the dichotomous relationship between blackness and whiteness. Four of the participants selected or considered black as representation of their experiences for reasons that varied, while two chose white. Angelettie and Akil presented alternatives (Brown and Green respectively) to black while maintaining black as a reference point in their color considerations. Worthy of note, is the manner in which whiteness is critically engaged by Deshawn and Omari. Contrastingly, Deshawn presents *whiteness* as a tool or a potential asset that blacks can *utilize*. He refers to whiteness as "a blank canvas" that is subject to whatever blackness makes of it. Omari, however, speaks to an understanding of whiteness as something external (Light) that has the power to expose and disrupt blackness' peace, or in other words, *act on* blackness.

The word metaphors revealed a symmetry between participants around perspective. Omari and Jerquan chose the words "success" and "life" respectively. Both rationales are critical and externally aimed at their structures, as they speak to these items as representations of system oversights that infringe on the primacy they place on preserving/protecting the human right to develop according to one's own convictions and sensibilities. The other participants chose words (i.e. resilience, strength, evolving and easygoing) that reflected those *inner* qualities, which also served as coping mechanisms that helped them survive environments perceived to be potentially hostile.

The sound metaphors offered another angle from which to glean their thought processes around how they perceived their experiences, on a sensory level. Four of the participants were extremely focused on their environments. They emphasized the import of staying alert and not

being subject to the pitfalls inherent in, what they perceive to be, the unpredictable and scary nature of their contexts. D-Dot and Jerquan, who expressed similar thoughts around being alert, offered the gunshot sound while Akil and Omari selected the groan or the tense sound associated with the impending approach of a scary or life changing event. The two others, Deshawn and Tracy Lee were more internally focused as their sounds (the drum and a round of applause) spoke to elements that resonated with them as empowered rather than vulnerable individuals.

Their lyrical representations also provided thematic correlations. All of the artist's song representations emphasized their heavy reliance on faith as they all acted to realize their strongly convicted belief that it was *their* time to shine. Angelettie illustrates this best as he sings," …we can make it baby…the time is now," from the Roy Ayers classic, We Live in Brooklyn, Baby. Further, the artist's lyric/song metaphors (i.e. On the Edge, We Live in Brooklyn and We Gone Be Alright) collectively express a similar knowing that despite the hardships that come with following their dreams of being in the industry, they will somehow make it and be *ok*.

Participants theorized as to what characterization would most accurately describe the nature of the can. According to their feedback, cultural control and deception were essential considerations for all of them, as they pondered the can's underlying nature from their point of view. The following quotes appear in succession in order to more readily observe their similarities. In tandem, the quotes represent the participant's common awareness of the cultural control and deception being displayed by their respective contexts, and highlight each participant's specific understanding of what the can represents: "Soul snatcher/Prison for our talents and outputs"; "…Control/power over another entity or human"; "…an opportunity (for culture) to be canned—closed in…or open to everyone…"; "…no longer a can of love. It's just a

can now…a tainted realm…"; "…a culmination of amplified traits…"; and

"…success…inevitable fall… of all humanity."

Aside from the similarities gleaned from each participant's "sound world," there were

other similarities and commonalities regarding their overall experiences, observed by the

researcher. One of the most obvious commonalities was the overall pattern that emerged,

regarding their experiences. The temporally and qualitatively, organic structure, consisting of

four distinct phases, reflects the full progression of their experiences as it explains the cultural

acclimation process for black urban males, in spaces governed by whiteness. They have been

mentioned previously, in greater detail:

PHASE 1
(*I'LL FIGURE IT OUT PHASE*) TRIAL AND ERROR AS A PRE-STRATEGY/INITIAL
NAVIGATION COMPASS.

PHASE 2
(*PEEP GAME PHASE*) GAIN NEW EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE--INTRODUCED TO
STRUCTURE'S PRODUCT/CAPITAL CENTRIC EMPHASIS

PHASE 3
(*NEW ATTITUDE PHASE*) USE NEW BELIEFS, VALUES AND ATTITUDES TO FUEL THE
CALIBRATION/READJUSTMENT OF EXPECTATIONS (VALUES), BELIEFS AND
ATTITUDES

PHASE 4
(*EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER PHASE*) REIMAGINE EXPERIENCE AS A
COMING OF AGE, LIFE LESSON LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

FIGURE 6.37 FOUR PHASE ACCLIMATION PROCESS

These four phases represent an educational process in as much as it maps the cultural acclimation process for these black males, in relation to their respective experiences with navigating white owned structures. As both sets of participants experienced the four phases, they essentially became students, educating themselves on how best to adapt to the *rules* of their respective environments.

Another commonality between participants, that frequently emerged in analysis, was their belief that one's survival depends on the willingness and ability to "bend but not break." This *"bend but don't break"* attitude was readily observable throughout each participant's attempt to survive/navigate their respective structure. The following examples highlight the consensus shared amongst the participants. Akil shares a *bend don't break* moment, recalling that, "I was distraught, but it let me know how the road was going to be from that point on…I was like oh! We fucked right now…*we just got to keep it moving and doing what we doing…"* He adds to the sentiment, stating," …Just Black people period…are just resilient people--*just being knocked down faced with every day…*you know, it's *always* some shit!"

Tracey Lee shares moments where he had to contort and adjust his comfort zone as an artist, for the sake of sustaining his livelihood, showing evidence of a "bend but don't break" coping/survival strategy. Lee Laments about his perceived loss of creative control when he points out, "I am the creator…but they have the final say so as to what is being put out and what is not being put out---now I have to perform…" He mentions another instance of feeling obligated to bend for the sake of his craft, when he shares, "…my mind was free and open at that particular time, but when I got into the game—got signed, and I encountered all of these things that I had never encountered before…then I'd be lying if I said it didn't stifle my creativity…that it didn't affect me mentally, with regards to my approach." For Tracey Lee, the bend don't break

attitude was apparent in those moments where he disagreed with the label's marketing philosophy, but still exhibited a spirit of compromise. In his own words Lee recalls, "I knew that that wasn't it—that wasn't the record! So, the outcome was…*they did what they wanted to do---and I sat back and I said ok, cool…like I said, I made the record…Ya'll make the move."*

Angelettie's strategic business approach, expressly hinges on the extent to which he is prepared to bend, if at all. Breaking, however, is not negotiable. D-Dot succinctly illustrates his thought process, going into a meeting with executives at the label: "Am I willing to bend at all…or *how far* am I gonna bend…am I gonna bend, but *don't break?!"* Jerquan expresses being broken as being lost, and in a space of deep unhappiness. He vows never to return to such a space, voluntarily: 'You gotta maintain yourself G—in order NOT to lose yourself…losing yourself is probably one of the worse things to do! That's the main thing …I couldn't give up nothing of myself to fall into a category where I'm unhappy. I can't do that! I can't be unhappy within me G…I can't lose like that again…"

Jerquan also speaks to the necessity of *having to adjust* to "the box" *(the system)*, despite its adversarial posture, which further illustrates his resolve to "bend but don't break" in order to survive, and perhaps thrive:

I mean, its mind boggling—its *twisting*…cause you don't know which way to go—it's like playing tug of war… you don't know which way to go…because you *got to survive…There is really a box G…you* have to realize how, but at some point in time, you do have to be able to adjust to that box. Although we shouldn't have to, but that's just reality…We have to adjust to the box at some point in time…but…don't let it *put you in a prison* or the hole. Do you fight the box? —No, you don't fight the box! The box could always be useful…

Jerquan recalls his struggle between identifying as an artist and having to conform to the school's emphasis on uniformity. In the face of school's power to use coercion to force conformity Jerquan admits he bends to the limit of his breakpoint, where he exclaims "…yall trying to take my creativity away from me…but at the same time…I still got family…"

Deshawn speaks directly to the fear of *breaking* contained in the "bend but don't break" attitude. He speaks to his observation that in so far as teachers function as extensions of the system, within the classroom, their subjectivities can determine whether the system is benevolently or malevolently aimed at a student, either adding to or significantly detracting from the quality and enjoyability of the school experience. He says, "but *they* have all the leverage as far as the system goes. And that's where the trouble comes in…it could *make or break* a person." Deshawn also exhibits a bend don't break mentality through his use of discernment regarding when and when not to push back, when he states, "…I mean, if this wasn't the time and place to kinda start something against the system or something, I'd be like yo, I'll just be cool this time…I don't feel like I was compromising myself…"

Omari, much like D-Dot, directly expresses a consideration for utilizing an uncompromising "bend but don't break" approach, to his navigation through the school experience. He proclaims: "So *that's* my truth! I'm like, you know what…I *can't* break! I *have* to bend and bend and bend…you know, but I *can't* break…" He also exhibits the bend don't break quality when he recalls his reaction to the situation he experienced at school when he was asked to pick a person other than the one he originally chose to represent, as his biggest inspiration. Rather than be broken through self-compromise, Omari drew a line and stood firm to preserve his integrity in the face of pressure by authority and pulled out of the event. In his words:

I said if I'm not doing Dr. York then I'm not doing it! That's the point when the teacher pulled me aside and said look, you're walking away from a big opportunity…I said that's fine…I'll walk away from a million more…but you asking me to tell you about who really inspired me—anything else you gonna get out of me talking about any other guys---you won't get the same energy…because I'm not inspired!

Self-Expressed Similarities- "Data Swap"

Student and artist participants were randomly paired and given an excerpt from the other's interview to read. They were instructed to be prepared to discuss what, if anything, resonated about the other's experience. By pointing out qualities or experiences they resonate with, they are expressing personal affinities or aspects that they see in the other's experience that are similar to or in common with something within them or their experience. The following represents those expressed similarities between artists and students.

 Each participant was given a two-paragraph sample, selected by the researcher. The only consideration for the sample was that it needed to highlight an expressed lived experience of that particular participant. Each participant then received such a sample from the transcript of someone in the opposite group. I paired the students and artists according to the order in which they appeared in the study. From the beginning of the research project, I listed the students and artists in random order. The tandems that resulted from this method were: Jerquan and Akil; Deshawn and Tracey Lee; and Omari and D-Dot. The following responses were prompted by the question, *"What did you read that resonated the most with you, about his experience?"*

Akil and Jerquan each read a short excerpt from the other's participant interviews. In Akil and Jerquan's case, they both resonated with the same aspect of each other's overall experience. Both participants reflected on the fight put forth by each to maintain their respective

identities. Akil's response to Jerquan's excerpt is as follows: *"Just the fight to maintain his*

identity… It was a parallel like you was saying …it's the same thing, and I've *been* him, you

know…Just yea…who I am and just being *different*…just always like…not never wanting to be

like everybody else."

Jerquan's response to Akil's excerpt was very similar, as he also focused on Akil's will to

maintain *his* identity: "He just wanted it to work his way! It's the situation where…you fighting

to maintain yourself…the understanding of *you*…Because they trying to inflict they output on

yours…and they trying to *change* it...it's slightly like peer pressure…" In essence, Jerquan's

acknowledgement that, "…they trying to inflict they output on yours…and trying to change it...,"

speaks to his awareness that what they both experienced was whiteness' privilege exerting its

ability to possess true ownership of *their* perceived God given right to identify themselves.

Jerquan's description mirrors the manner in which *whiteness as property* operates and supports

the observation that race was indeed an impactful factor on identity development, within their

respective experiences.

In a related vein, Tracey Lee and Deshawn both point out the criticality of being able to

freely express creativity, both agreeing that expression is key. Deshawn speaks to this in terms of

Tracey Lee's inability to communicate with the label in order to find out why the freedom to

fully express his creativity was being compromised. Lee resonated with Deshawn's vigilance,

relative to him not compromising his ability and right to freely express his identity and having

the support in his environment to do so. The following is *Lee's* own words, as he recounts what

resonated with him, upon reading Deshawn's interview excerpt:

> …Well I guess, from me reading that… I believe that expression is key. And he is right
>
> when it comes to music…*especially* when it comes to music…and from the period that

I'm in, as far as being an emcee and as far as being a musician…you know that there is

probably *the*…it should be *the* focal point of creativeness…being able to express yourself

and being comfortable expressing yourself in a manner that you wish to express--

which… really exudes what you're about! So, I definitely felt his take on it…As far

as…whatever setting he was in, he was comfortable in it to the point where he was---he

felt *comfortable* about expressing himself to the fullest extent…--so yea…I agree with

the young man…again, because in music…in order for the music to be *most*

effective…especially coming from an artist perspective…especially coming from

somebody that *uses words*…expression is, again, it *should be*…it *should be* the

number one concentration…Number one point or focus…I *felt* that young man when he

said, where he was, allowed him to be or set the stage for him to express himself in the

manner in which he *wanted* to express himself, and not be restrained or held back.

Deshawn, upon reading about Lee's experience with the label not allowing him sticker

rights to promote Biggie being on his album, expressed that he, like Lee, would absolutely be

fixated on understanding "Why?!" Deshawn faced similar obstacles in terms of his freedom of

expression being threatened in school, but was able to gain an audience with those in authority

and ask questions directly to gain clarity in real time. The difference, according to Deshawn, who

empathizes with Lee, is that his student status placed him in closer proximity to those who have

the potential to make good or bad decisions, on his behalf. Consequently, gaining access to a

person that can provide clarity through direct communication (also, self-expression) would be

easier for him to achieve than Lee. Deshawn explains:

…as far as like similarities…Of course I would rack my brain first…trying to figure

out…like where it's actually coming from…then again, the reaction would be different

because I was actually able to *go and talk* to these people… the difference would come

in how I reacted…so like I went around…I asked questions…and that probably came

from my accessibility to people—he's in the music industry, where people are like states

away, and this and that…my counselor and principles and stuff, they were down the

hall…

Deshawn and Tracey Lee express similar experiences in terms of being vigilant about protecting

their perceived God given rights to express themselves freely. Also highlighted in the

experiences they shared in common is the hidden and undemocratic protrusion of white

(racialized) neutrality into both of their experiences. In Lee's case, there were actions taken that

inhibited his ability to fully express his art by disallowing him to advertise the Notorious BIG's

single from his album. In Deshawn's case, there was an undemocratically induced schedule

change that compromised his time management ability related to class preparation. His grades

suffered as a result of the change. It turns out that the mandate came from the Board of Regents,

in attempt to correct a seat time issue, which directly impacts the school system's revenue

stream.

Despite Deshawn's ability to ask questions and get answers to where the approval came

from where Lee was not able, in both cases (Board of Regents, Arista Records) the authority and

the rationales for the change did not consider the humans involved but the monetary dimension

only. In both cases decisions were made at the executive level, without input from them,

affecting them in a material way. In these expressed experiences, Lee and Deshawn are

showcasing the manner in which whiteness objectifies those aspects it perceives as functioning

to serve its monetary interests. In so doing their expressions have rendered clear moments of

racialized inequity that resemble interest convergence and whiteness as property scenarios.

Deric expressed a strong resonation with Omari's sense of criticality. He saw himself in Omari, a kid that was passionate and raised at home to be critically conscious and willing to pushback to honor his beliefs:

So how *I* can relate to the boy is…I was *always* challenging history in school…not politics, but I used to challenge history in school…I would always be the guy to say you know, there were five presidents before George Washington and you didn't know that did you…I would say shit like that. So, I could definitely relate to that…you know what I mean…cause I was that kid! I was challenging them in class specifically because of my mother---she was a school teacher and a doctor so, it was almost like I'd go home and my mother would say what did you learn today…and I'd tell her and she'd be like "what the fuck is that?!" If you *know* it's not what it's supposed to be…then you *gotta* challenge it…so yea, that's where he resonated with me… so you gotta credit the kid and where he comes from, cause his parents or   his grandmother or whoever raised him— aunts, uncles—whoever raised him---cause   obviously they raised him to *know*…to not look at everything for what it is…cause you gotta look a little deeper.

Omari was equally impressed with D-Dot's tenacity to stand up for his truth. Based on similar personal experiences, he related with D-Dot's observation about the money centric, non-emotional ethic of the industry and the need to proceed with caution as to not forfeit one's soul in the process of "making it." He reflected:

I can *definitely relate* to wanting to speak your truth! Yea man, the thing that hit me the most…the *most important* thing…was what he said about the creativity versus the left brain, in the industry…as far as mathematics versus you know, your artistry… there was a part when he said…they were seeing that this would make them more money…but it

wouldn't necessarily coincide with what you felt you was supposed to be doing with your *soul!* That's the same thing with like the Flocabulary competition! not necessarily monetary, in that situation…but as far as outreach. They were *sure* that that was going to put APS on the map—they were sure that that was gonna put Carver High School on the map. And, you know, *all you have to do* is sacrifice this…and you can see horns on people's faces and stuff like that man telling you to negate truth…there's something about that…

Omari recollects another experience that parallels the words of D-Dot, regarding maintaining one's soul, over and above chasing monetary gains. He expresses respect and mutual agreement with Angelettie's expressed position, "If you can't walk away from the table, then you're not ready to do business":

…had another situation where they were saying that it was money, but I can't remember exactly what uh…the scenario was…but what it *really* was that didn't sit right with me—it was 20,000 dollars on the line…they said look…enough is enough…this is twenty thousand dollars….you can help this, you can help that…I said yea, but that's not *truth*...that's not me…you know…*so I get* what he was saying…and I don't know if this was a negative or a positive thing…you know, cause twenty thousand dollars couldn't hurt your pocket…but it has to still be something about the man who says *no*… to the dollar amount...and when someone is telling you *to sell your soul,* pretty much—or sell your *soul purpose* away. *Give* your soul purpose away…you know…for a few dollars…then you won't sleep well at night…you know…you didn't make it honestly…

As demonstrated by Omari and Deric's responses, criticality and the ability to speak truth to power is a clear commonality between their experiences. However, their mutual belief in the

power of saying no as an equalizer, signals an implicit awareness of racialized power and subsequently the preparedness for a scenario where its deployment may mitigate the assumed privilege of whiteness to completely objectify their blackness. In other words, Deric and Omari share a common critical disposition that functions as a tactical strategy when aimed at white structural power. They both offer the idea that possession of a critical disposition and the ability to say no to the deal or the proposition of those in authority, are vital components of a solution that can thwart the default dependence created by expressed agreeance with *the contract* (be it verbal, non-verbal or legal). Such actions disrupt whiteness' ability to abuse blackness under the pretense of long term converging interests and/or through its privileged authority to "truly possess" what counts as black identity development.

6.3 Conclusion

This research explored how black males navigate and make sense of contexts where they are subject to an inequitable power dynamic. Specifically, it sought to understand how black male artists and black male students uniquely respond to the seeming race neutrality that underpins the culture of the music industry and urban classrooms, and to locate commonalities that may exist between the two experiences. Such an exploration of black male thought and action as it relates to navigating inequitable power, is a distinct contribution by this researcher to the academic literature, as I sought to compare black male experiences across two generally separate spheres. Having researched both experiences, it can be said that both were rife with structural racial undertones and despite the qualitative differences between the experiences, there were key elements commonly shared by all participants. Here are some insights that were gleaned.

Both sets of participants' experiences were essentially parallel as they were able to be distinctively placed in four distinct cultural acclimation/educational phases, each progressively adding to the participants overall understanding of their structure, as well as their position an ability to navigate within it. In this regard, the artists and the students were being *educated* by experience and through a process in which they learned to survive. Just as the students self-identified as artists, the artists *and* the students were relegated to being students of "the game," so to speak, despite their primary function within their respective structures. They both experienced a consistent high-stakes, "do or die" element of pressure, as part of their "normal" daily reality within these structures. Several common elements in their respective sound worlds are illustrative of such perceived pressure, insecurity and acculturated fear, consistently felt by the participants (i.e. gunshots and scary sounds).

Consequently, they all embraced a "bend don't break" attitude as a rule for successfully navigating their respective spaces. But what does it mean to feel compelled to consciously approach school or the music industry with a mind-set of pro-actively acquiescing to the collateral damage potentially generated by white privilege? What does it mean to strategically resist power for purposes of systemically changing the inequitable dynamic, but also reactively as an attempt to avoid reaching the perceived breaking point, where, in D-Dot's words, the cultural aspect "comes out on the other side unclear to us." Does a bend but don't break sensibility connote a level of wisdom gained, because when employed it potentially maximizes one's chances of survival or is it a concession to the normalcy granted to expectations that black males must willingly relinquish their black cultural standpoints in order to coexist with whites or in spaces influenced by whiteness? Should either of those explanations qualify as a win for black males?

The most basic human instinct is survival. That being said, for some, the major take-away from the participants' journey/educative experiences will be that contorting in the face of power in order to sustain life in the most comfortable manner possible is not only a win, but it is the wisest move for the best outcome that can be expected, given the ubiquitous nature of whiteness as property. If it is the best that can be expected, then what are the costs? Clearly the critical sensibilities and alertness needed to navigate their respective terrains of whiteness were heightened and developed as they matriculated through their experiences. As such, a conclusion could be made that they were made wiser, stronger and more self-aware. Certainly, such attributes gained from an educative process must be *all good*, and in being so, constitute a "win," right? But the question still remains, "at what cost?"

On the flipside, given the systemic expectation that black males relinquish their cultural standpoint and the choice of black males to bend but not break as a response to it, it can be argued that such tendencies amount to a form of sanctioned *cultural settling*. By cultural settling I'm referring to a cultural compromise so profound that it becomes a dysconsciously (King, 1991) performed acquiescence, passed down by those who *settled* for a bend don't break approach in the face of white power for generations, extending back to the period where blacks were enslaved in this country. King's (1991) dysconcsious racism pertains to white's taken for granted assumptions. Here, I am reinterpreting King's concept of dysconsciousness as a way to discuss black experience and the manner in which racism pushes people of color to survive, rather than thrive.

My biggest take-away from the participant's experiences is that mastering the art of bend don't break seems to be tantamount to mastering the art of survival. Surviving is perceived as the ultimate goal, the attainment of which constitutes a victory or a win for the participant. To be

sure, through their experiences, they learned how to be critical and strategic enough to roll with the punches and endure long enough to create security and *survive* the course—but is that a win? Surviving the course? Is thriving a notion too fanciful and inflated for a black male to fathom in such structures?

The relinquishment of the expectation to thrive and the replacement of such, with the expectation to survive, is a behavior that can at once be characterized as wise and victorious as well as deficit-based and defeatist. To illustrate the conundrum, in terms of how to assign value to the bend don't break attitude of black males in the face of whiteness, I liken the participants' experiences to a rock that fell into a moving stream of water. The stream imposes its force on the rock. Over time the constant stream and pressure of the current reshape it from its original form, making it smoother and less resistive to the current. Because its shape has been augmented by the stream, it no longer has to endure the friction it once did, which facilitates a less confrontational experience for the rock. The stream benefits by reshaping the rock because it can now flow without the threat of the rock as an impediment to its current. The question is, did the rock receive a structural upgrade or was its nature and character compromised or forced into submission. The scene from Roots when Kunta Kente is whipped until he breaks, and accepts the name Tobe, comes to mind as illustrative of the previous point.

In such a scenario, the perspective of the beholder is vital in terms of what becomes the official interpretation of such a phenomenon. The stream made the stone smoother and less apt to resist or be resisted by the stream. Some might even argue that this is an example of interests converging and that the stones so affected and reshaped have become more refined because of their proximity to the culture of water and as such are more amenable to the space they inhabit. Others may argue that the stone has been structurally robbed of its original character and is no

longer able to exist or be related to according to its original design. Whether or not such a

process is explained by erosion (violence) or flow enhancement (positive

modification/improvement) depends on who has the right to define, which is usually an exclusive

privilege of whiteness. This right to define and reshape is essentially the right to truly possess,

spoken of by Harris (1993). It is the privilege of whiteness, acting on blackness in a manner that

projects an attitude that says," I know better than you who and what you need to be." Its mass

acceptance by blacks as normal is a hegemonic by product of being objectified by whiteness over

time.

Some may also argue that a system that teaches its "students" how to adapt is one of

necessity and value for sustaining life. I submit, that accepting bend don't break as the ultimate

adaptability/survival skill, rather than accepting an approach to whiteness premised on an

irreproachable right to *thrive,* is a phenomenon worthy of further research. Just beneath the

surface, bend don't break signals an inherent acceptance of the inequity that comes with white

authority. A culture of white male ownership is invariably a culture, like slavery, that

expects/demands black male acquiescence to the rules that extend from the undemocratically

applied subjectivity of whiteness. The structural aspects that are limiting and coercively enforced

by school, should be examined more closely for violence done by its constraints on black identity

development and self-worth.

In cases where school is administering a context for human development that is actually

violent in its prohibition of the right of black males to form their own black identity, the onus

should be on the school system ("Stream") to adjust and not by reshaping the cultural essence of

the children ("rocks"). As it stands, black children are expected to curb their humanity to better

fit the system in order to better camouflage the violence they incur, thus allowing school to

present itself as the *safe* space that it is expected to be. Going to school with a sensibility that is focused, out of perceived necessity, on protecting the soul by bending but not breaking, is an attempt to prepare for an atmosphere of extreme uncertainty and undue insecurity as it pertains to black students, particularly males in this case.

Such a space, sanctioned by the bureaucratic powers that be, is a space that is inherently confrontational to blackness. The question becomes whether or not the true confrontational nature of the space is ever realized by the masses of people who encounter it due to the historical normalcy and race neutrality often ascribed to such a dynamic. Such a dynamic has altered many black male trajectories in the history of public schooling post-*Brown*. The increasing need for uniformity and absolute control of people's instinct to express cultural individuality represents an increasing disdain for expressed culture, in white owned spaces. Policies that support such an adverse culture within school environments, either through selective ignorance or dysconsciousness (King, 1991), are aiding and abetting violence being done to black students, in the name of educating and preparing them for life in the real world. How does the nature of their lives as glorified survivors compare to what it may have been if exposed to a true educational context that promotes thriving? What expense will be demanded of them as they settle, over time, as rocks that fell into the stream? These remain as vital, yet unanswered questions.

As a student and as an artist, I too have experienced the four cultural acclimation phases and have endured many of these same challenges. I have been Jerquan, going into a new school environment in ninth grade and just wanting the space to feel like there was love present, but instead of love, being met with indifference. Consequently, I was often left wondering if I was doing something wrong. I have been Deshawn who proactively sought to create personal rapports with administrators in order to feel more secure and mitigate the prospect of being

unfairly or negatively targeted by the school's subjectively administered penalty enforcing power. I have been Omari who, after "peeping game," and understanding the limitations of the environment regarding meaningful black cultural exchanges and experiences within the school, created a space that allowed for those black identity affirming experiences to occur. I, like Akil experienced being marketed almost exclusively to white audiences without concern for our fear of the potential loss of our black fan base and despite identifying as a "conscious" black person, had to suck it up and accept the label's marketing scheme. Tracy Lee and I both did hit songs with legendary feature artists (Notorious BIG and Jay-Z) that the label decided to sabotage with no expressed reason being offered. D-Dot and I both created similar unease with label executives by daring to stand up to authority on behalf of the integrity of the cultural aesthetic, and probably paid the price for it, in terms of bridges burned and support lost.

Like all of them, my experience was predicated on the fear of not knowing and being in control of my own destiny, especially as it relates to *my* identity. Every time I switched codes as a student and as an artist, I was making myself more amenable to the idea of blackness presented to me by whiteness, to avoid the friction that came with not switching. Those who were good at it and understood the language cues, were granted more access into whiteness and were considered to be more successful, according to what whiteness defines as black success. What would I be if allowed and encouraged by the structures I experienced to freely develop as a black male, rather than as an objectified "student of the game" (of whiteness). What if "education" was not something that could only be granted by traversing fear based and high stakes environments, where survival's chances solely depend on how quickly one can adapt to the unwritten and written rules?

I emerged on the other side of the experience in both accounts aware that cultural compromise was requisite, to some degree, for "success" in the real world. Is it a win for me to have had to feel like that in my developmental stage as an adolescent, or even in my developmental stage as a young black man engaging whiteness in a professional context? Even now, I wonder if my perceived refinement via exposure to western education has led me in directions that my "unrefined" self would not have supported. Or, put differently, did my western education preclude me from fulfilling the trajectory that might have been undertaken had not it been for the exposure to whiteness and the forced embrace of the bend don't break mentality that would allow me to survive within it?

What would I and all of the participants have been if our *raw* cultural sensibilities and values were permitted to be nurtured in school spaces such that culture became a way to add value to the space, instead of being perceived as a detractor? I wonder, as a black male and as an educator, how can our black male students be positioned to win as free "thrivers" instead of *winning* as cautious and calculated "survivors?" Or is cautiously surviving, with its reliance on developed critical skills, as good as can be expected, in regard to winning for black males in white owned systems? Going through similar experiences endured by the participants was tantamount to being taught and learning strictly for the test. Surviving/passing the test becomes all important as the focal point of any learning done, so much so, that other uses of the content knowledge outside of how it is to be used for the test are rarely, if ever considered.

As such the entire educational experience over time becomes reduced to being trained to "hang in there" with an adversarial test/foe, where one's defeat at its hands could render one valueless as a student, in the eyes of the structure, and the entire experience, purposeless. With *education* reduced to a single exam or performance, avoiding failure out of fear becomes the true

motivation for *learning*, transforming the goal of surviving the *test* into an inflated proxy for thriving in life. I submit that at a certain point and time, black educators, scholars and those affected for centuries by whiteness' strangle hold on black identity development, must remove their veneer of feigned ignorance, regarding their unchecked embrace of survival as a proxy for thriving, and fully address by all means, the structural violence that continues to be directed at black males, in the name of "schooling them."

REFERENCES

Act, N. C. L. B. (2001). PL 107-110. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Ahlquist, R., Gorski, P. C., & Montano, T. (2011). *Assault on Kids: How hyper-accountability, corporatization, deficit ideologies, and Ruby Payne are destroying our schools. Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education, Volume 402*. New York: Peter Lang.

Alexander, M. (2010) *The new jim crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York: New Press.

Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill, NC; University of North Carolina Press.

Aull, I.(2012). Zero tolerance, frivolous juvenile court referrals, and the school-to- prison pipeline: Using arbitration as a screening-out method to help plug the pipeline. *Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution*, *27*(1), 179-206.

Bagley, C. & Cancienne, M.B. (2002) *Dancing the data*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing

Ball, S. (2012). *Global education inc: New policy networks and the neo-liberal imaginary*. New York: Routledge.

Barlow, A. (2003). *Between fear and hope: Globalization and race in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Bell, D. A. (1995) Racial realism. In Crenshaw, Kimberlé, Neil Gotanda, and Garry Peller (Eds.) *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. (pp. 302-314). New York, New York: The New Press.

Bell, D.A. (1995) Brown v. Board of Education and the interest convergence dilemma. In Crenshaw, Kimberlé, Neil Gotanda, and Garry Peller (Eds.) *Critical race theory:*

The key writings that formed the movement. (pp. 20-28). New York, New York: The New Press.

Bell, D. A. (1980). *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, *93*(3), 518-533.

Boateng, F. (1990). Combating deculturalization of the African-American child in the public school system: A multicultural approach. *Going to school: The African-American experience* (pp. 73-84). Albany, New York: Suny Press:

Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in qualitative research.* London: Sage

Bogle, D. (1993). *Toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies, and bucks: An interpretive history of Blacks in American films*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America* (Vol. 57). New York: Basic Books.

Brown, C. (2007). *Dude, Where's My Black Studies Department?: The Disappearance of Black Americans from Our Universities*. Berkely, California: North Atlantic Books.

Brown, J. (2005). *I feel good*. New York, NY; New American Library.

Buras, K. L. (2015). *Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the Market Meets Grassroots Resistance*. New York: Routledge.

Buras, K. (2011). Race, charter schools, and conscious capitalism: On the spatial politics of whiteness as property (and the unconscionable assault on black New Orleans). *Harvard Educational Review*, *81*(2), 296-331.

Buras, K. (2008). *Rightist multiculturalism*. New York: Roudedge.

Cassell, J. A., & Nelson, T. (2013). Exposing the effects of the "Invisible Hand" of the neoliberal agenda on institutionalized education and the process of sociocultural reproduction. *Interchange*, *43*(3), 245-264.

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing grounded theory*: *A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Charnas, D. (2011). *The big payback: The history of the business of hip-hop*. Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books, LLC

Chang, J. (2005). *Can't stop, won't stop: a history of the hip hop generation*. New York, New York: Picador/St. Martin's Press.

Childs, D. (2015). Socially constructing race and history: Exploring Black identity and popular culture in social studies classrooms through cultural studies framework. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *8*(2), 55-74

Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F., & York, R. (1966). The Coleman Report. *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health, Education & Welfare. Office of Education.

Collins, P.H. (2000) *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). NY: Routledge

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Cox, K. L. (2011). *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South was created in American popular culture*. NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Crenshaw, K., Neil, G., Peller, G. & Thomas, K. (1995) *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York, New York: The New Press.

Dance, L. J. (2002). *Tough fronts: The impact of street culture on schooling*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Dancy, T. E. (2014). (Un) doing hegemony in education: Disrupting school-to-prison pipelines for black males. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *47*(4), 476-493

Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2006). *Critical race theory in education: All God's children got a song*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Daykin, N. (2004). The role of music in an arts-based qualitative inquiry. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(2), 36-44.

Du Bois, W., & Edwards, B. (2007). *The souls of black folk*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Eaves, S. (2014). From art for arts sake to art as means of knowing: A rationale for advancing arts-based methods in research, practice and pedagogy. *Journal of Business Research Methods*, *12*(2), 147-159.

Elias, M. (2000). Disparity in black and white? *USA Today*, p. 9D.

Ferguson, A. (2001). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity*. MI: University of Michigan Press.

Franklin, J. & Higginbotham, E. (2009). *From slavery to freedom: A history of African Americans.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

George, N. (2005). *Hip Hop America*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Giroux, H. (2003). Racial injustice and disposable youth in the age of zero tolerance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *16*(4), 553-565.

Giroux, H. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Glaser, B.G. (1978) *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research,* New York: Aldine de Gruyter

Golann, J. W. (2015). The paradox of success at a no-excuses school. *Sociology of Education*, 88(2), 103-119.

Goodman, E. (2000, January 4). 'Zero tolerance' means zero chance for troubled kids. *Centre Daily Times*, 8.

Gordon, R. (2013). *Respect Yourself: Staxx Records and the Soul Explosion*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M. & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. *Culture, media, language*, (pp.128-138.) London: Hutchinson.

Hall, S., Du Gay, P., Janes, L., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (1997). *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony Walkman.* London: Open University.

Hall, P. A. (1999). *In the vineyard: Working in African American studies*. TN: University of Tennessee Press.

Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard law review*, 106(8) 1707-1791.

Haymes, S. N. (1995). *Race, culture, and the city: A pedagogy for Black urban struggle*. New York, NY: SUNY Press.

Heitzeg, N. A. (2009). Education or incarceration: Zero tolerance policies and the school to prison pipeline. *Forum on Public Policy Online, 2009*(2)
http://forumonpublicpolicy.com/summer09/issuesineducation.html

hooks, b. (1992) *Black looks: Race and representation.* Boston, MA: South End Press.

Jenoure, T. (2002). Sweeping the temple: A performance collage. In C. Bargley & M.B. Can-
cienne (Eds.), *Dancing the data* (pp. 73-89). New York, NY: Peter Lang

Katz, M. 1989. *The undeserving poor: From the war on poverty to the war on welfare.* New
York: Pantheon Books

Kinfano, S. (1996). Afrocentric education in supplementary schools: Paradigm and practice at
the Mary McLeod Bethune Institute. *Journal of Negro Education*, 65, 209-218.

King, J. E. (1991) Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of
teachers. *The Journal of Negro Education* 60.2: 133-146.

Kitwana, B. (2002). *The hip hop generation: Young Blacks and the crisis in African American
culture*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Koch, L. O. (1999). *Yardbird suite: A compendium of the music and life of Charlie Parker*.
Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Lack, B. (2009). No excuses: A critique of the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) within
charter schools in the USA. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, *7*(2),
126-153.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2004). Landing on the Wrong Note: The Price We Paid for Brown.
Educational Researcher, *33*(7), 3–13.

Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York, NY: Guilford
Publications

Ledger, A., & McCaffrey, T. (2015). Performative, Arts-Based, or Arts-Informed? Reflections on the Development of Arts-Based Research in Music Therapy. *Journal of Music Therapy*, *52*(4), 441-456

Leonardo, Z. (2013). *Race frameworks: A multidimensional theory of racism and education*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Lipman, P. (2008). Mixed-income schools and housing: advancing the neoliberal urban agenda. *Journal of Education Policy*, *23*(2), 119-134.

Lipman, P. (2011). Neoliberal education restructuring dangers and opportunities of the present crisis. *Monthly Review*, *63*(3), 114.

MacQueen K. M., & Guest, G. (2008). An introduction to team-based qualitative research. In G. Guest & K. M. MacQueen (Eds.), *Handbook for team-based qualitative research* (pp. 3- 19). Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Merry, M. S., & New, W. (2008). Constructing an authentic self: The challenges and promise of African-centered pedagogy. *American Journal of Education*, *115*(1), 35-64.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Moriearty, P. L., & Carson, W. (2012). Cognitive warfare and young Black males in America. *Journal of. Gender Race & Just.*, *15*, 281-313.

Moynihan, D. P. (1965). The Negro family: The case for national action. Washington, DC: Department of Labor

Namey, E., Guest, G., Thairu, L., & Johnson, L. (2008). Data reduction techniques for large qualitative data sets. In G. Guest & K. M. MacQueen (Eds.), *Handbook for team-based qualitative research* (pp.137-61). Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1994) *Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s.* New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Peck, J., &Tickell, A. (2002). Neoliberalizing space. In *Spaces of neoliberalism: Urban restructuring in North America and Western Europe,* ed. N. Brenner and N. Theodore, 33–57. Oxford: Blackwell.

Pedroni, T. C. (2011). Urban shrinkage as a performance of whiteness: Neoliberal urban restructuring, education, and racial containment in the post-industrial, global niche city. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *32*(2), 203-215.

Piana, L.D. (2000, February 9). Crime and punishment in schools: Students of color are facing more suspensions because of racially biased policies. *San Francisco Chronicle*, A21.

Risk, A. N. A. (1983). National Commission on Excellence in Education. *Washington, DC*: United States Department of Education

Rose, T. (1994). *Black noise: Rap music and black culture in contemporary America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Ross, S. M., McDonald, A.j., Alberg, M., Gallagher, B.M., & Calloway, F. (2005). *Urban school reform: Achievement and school climate outcomes for the Knowledge Is Power Program*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.

Ruffner-Ceasar, J. (2012). Imagery matters: Exploring the representation(s) of African American male students in season four of the wire. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation) University of Maryland, College Park Maryland.

Saldana, J. (2003) *Longitudinal qualitative research: Analyzing change through time.* Walnut
Creek, CA: AltaMira Press

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. New York: NY Sage.

Saltman, K.J. (2010). Introduction. In K.J. Saltman & D.A. Gabbard (Eds.) *Education as
enforcement: The militarization and corporatization of schools (pp.1-18).* New
York: Routledge

Souther, J. M. (2006). *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent
City*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press.

Spring, J. (2015). *Economization of education: Human capital, global corporations, skills-based
schooling*. New York: Routledge.

Stake, R. (1995) *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for
developing grounded theory* (2nd. Ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Taylor, E., Gillborn, D., & Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *Foundations of critical race theory in
education*. New York: Routledge

Thermstrom, A., & Thernstrom, S. (2003). *No excuses: Closing the racial gap in learning.* New
York: Simon & Schuster.

Urban, W. J., & Wagoner, J. L. (2009). *American education: A history*. New York: Routledge.

Watkins, W. H. (2001). *The White architects of Black education: Ideology and power in
America, 1865-1954*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Wolcott, H. E. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Woodson, C. G. (1933). The mis-education of the Negro. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press

Williams, J. W. (1987). The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy. *Chicago: University of Chicago*.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Protocol for Artists

1. How would you describe yourself as a human/person?

2. How would you describe your experience as an artist signed to a label?

3. Based on your experiences can you share the different types of situations that you may have encountered with any label that led to conflict?

4. In your experience, how would you respond when you perceived that there was a conflict between you and the label in terms of expectations as an artist?

5. How would you characterize the labels attitude toward your opinions and views about your product, generally speaking?

6. What typically would be the outcomes of differences between you and the record label, in your experience?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol for Students

1. How would you describe yourself as a human/person?

2. How would you describe your experience as a high school student with respect to self-expression among teachers and administrators?

3. Based on your experiences at school can you share the different types of situations that you may have encountered that compromised your sense of fairness or right and wrong?

4. In your experience, how would you respond when you perceived that there was a conflict between you and the administration in terms of expectations as a student?

5. How would you characterize the administrators' and teachers' attitudes toward your opinions and views, generally speaking?

6. What typically would be the outcomes of differences between you and the school faculty and staff, in your experience?

Appendix C

Visual Diagram for Interview Process

The interview process for this study will feature *four* interviews conducted in two phases.

PHASE ONE: **THREE INTERVIEWS**

First Interview: Narrating Experiences in School and the Music Industry. The first interview will last for approximately 45-60 minutes. It will be semi structured and feature a protocol of approximately 8 questions including follow up questions that establish a baseline narrative that speaks to each of the 8 participants' (students and artists) navigational experience of white power structures in school and the music industry, respectively.

Second Interview: Photo Elicitation. The second interview will last 30-45 minutes and explore photos that participants take or find to represent their experiences.

Third Interview: Excerpt Elicitation and Color-Sound-Word Elicitation. Once the first two interviews establish a deep tissue understanding of the participants' individual experiences, interview excerpts selected by the researcher, which represent both student and artist perspectives, will be shared as an elicitation device for more experiential reflection by the participants. These reflections also serve as a point of comparison and contrast between the participants and will be utilized to address the third research question. Colors-Sounds-Words will be invited at the conclusion of the interview to creatively and continuously surface key metaphors. This interview will run 30-45 minutes.

PHASE TWO: **FINAL FOURTH INTERVIEW**

Fourth Interview: Audio Elicitation and the Can. After providing a "soundtrack" consisting of one to three songs that best capture/characterize participants' experiences, a final fourth interview of 30-45 minutes will focus on their selections as part of their "sound world." Participants will also provide a word or short phrase that defines the "Can, which will be written on a can-like image that I provide.

Overall Coding/Analysis: Key metaphors and CRT tenants of whiteness as property and interest convergence.

Appendix D

(Coding Book-Key Page)

R1 (1-76)
R2 (76-155)
R3 (155-170)

PARTICIPANTS---
(Students)
Deshawn---Red
Bam—Blue
Faise—Green

(Artists)
Akil—Purple
Tray-Lee—Orange
D-Dot—Grey

Structural Coding   --Dark Red
Descriptive Coding—Light Green
Values Coding—Light Blue

R1 How do contemporary professional Black male recording artists navigate the recording industry's tendency to restrain their personal "voice" and creative agency in the process of commodifying their talents?

(1st INTERVIEW)

Akil wants to see people in peace, doing themselves—(Line 4-9)
I: The first question for my man is how would you describe yourself Akil, as a human? —As a person...who is that person called Akil?
A: Um hmm...I guess um...I guess in hind sight, thinking about it...I'm someone, Akil is someone who wants the best for every living human on the planet...um...he wants to always see people...in peace, um...doing themselves and stuff that you do just...um...I'm just a warm hearted person...and stuff that likes to warm the hearts of people—R1

V: ALL HUMAN LIFE HAV
V: FREEDOM TO BE ONESE
A: I LIKE WARM HEARTE
INTERACTIONS

m someone striving to want the best for myself—(Line 20-31)

I: You think your name has any type of bearing on who you are as a person?
A: Um well, now...my uh...my given name....is Dante Givens...um so...Then I ended up taking on Akil...um which means um...wise...or intelligent...the part of the brain that's you're...when you come up with sound decisions

B: NAMES SHOULD MEA
V: WISDOM/INTELLIGE

1

Appendix E
(Consent Form)

Title: "Soul in a Can": Exploring How Black Male Students and Artists Navigate the
      Constraints of Urban Classrooms and the Music Industry
Principal Investigator: Kristen Buras
Student Investigator: Garfield Bright

I.   Purpose:
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to learn how professional black male recording artists and black male students deal with the way unequal power works in the recording industry and the classroom. You are invited to participate because you are either a black male student or an artist. You may participate if you are a recording artist who has been signed or distributed by a major label. You may also participate if you are a high school graduate between the ages of 19 and 21 years of age.

II.   Procedures:

If you decide to be a part of this study, you will participate in 4 interviews with the researcher Garfield Bright at Georgia State University. You and the researcher will meet on 4 separate days over the course of 9 weeks until the 4 interviews have been completed. If you are unable to come to Georgia State University's Literacy Center, Rm. 101, your scheduled interview will be conducted via telephone or Skype. These interviews will be videotaped. The first interview will be from 45-to 60 minutes. The next 3 interviews will last from 30 to 45 minutes. In preparation for these last three interviews, you will be asked to provide photos and musical selections that you feel relate to the experiences that you mention in the first interview.

III.   Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV.   Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. However, the researcher hopes to gain information that will show how black male recording artists and students handle the differences in power they face in school and the music industry. Findings of the research may inform fairer school policies for all students, particularly black males.
V.   Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

VI.   Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Garfield Bright and Kristen Buras will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly like the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). You have the option to use your real name in the study. If you do not want your name used, we will use a different name and facts that might point to you directly will be altered to maintain confidentiality. We will also make sure that your name and other identifying facts about you will not appear when we publish or present this study, unless you provide permission to use your name. The information you provide will be stored in a locked cabinet and password and firewall-protected computer. The video recordings will be destroyed after December of 2017 unless you request otherwise in writing prior to that time.

VII.   Contact Persons:

 If you have any questions about the study you may contact Kristen Buras or Garfield Bright. Kristen Buras can be reached through email at Kburas@gsu.edu. Garfield Bright can be contacted by phone at 323-635-7315 or through email at: gbright1@student.gsu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII.   Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be video recorded during the interviews, please sign below.

_____   _____
Participant   Date

_____   _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date

If you are willing to be identified by name in this study, please sign below.
_____   _____
Participant   Date
_____   _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix F
(Glossary)

Alternative Hip-Hop—A strand of Hip-Hop, often promoted to white audiences that relies heavily on strong live performance elements and content that focuses less on commercial Hip-Hop trends (misogyny, gross materialism and gimmicks) and more on displaying technical skills such as cadence, use of literary devices (Metaphors and similes, personification, etc.) and promoting socially conscious "feel good" themes such as unity through adherence to the original elements of Hip-Hop (D-Jaying, Breakdancing, Rapping, and Graffiti)--Also referred to as "Backpack rap"

B-Boy—literally translated means "Break Boy"—so named because they dance to break-beats (the break down/instrumental section of records-the "break" portion). Hence the name "break dancer." A B-Boy is an individual who primarily identifies as a break-dancer.

Billboard— One of the premier trade magazines of the music industry, it is widely considered to be the foremost authority on ranking popular music. It renders weekly reports on chart positions of songs from all genres.

Bounce—A type of southern Hip-Hop, known for its use of heavy baselines and drums along with a heavy reliance on chant based choruses. This genre is often associated with strip club culture.

DJ—A person who plays and selects music at clubs and on radio stations. The more popular mainstream DJ's are in a position to be taste makers for what is trending in Hip-Hop music.

Label--an abbreviated reference to a record label.

Lyrical Hip-Hop—Refers to a form of rap that features an emphasis on creative uses of literary devices (metaphors, similes, foreshadowing, irony, personification, etc.), cadence, witty punchlines and meticulous plot/story development.

MC-- (Emcee)-Master of Ceremony; highly skilled (lyrical) rapper and performer

Rap—An element of Hip-Hop, featuring spoken lyrics that usually have a rhyme scheme. It is an expression that can be delivered in acapella form or over a beat . If it is a rap that doesn't have a chorus attached to it or if it is created spontaneously, it is considered a freestyle rap. If a chorus is included, then it becomes a rap song. Both are performed by "rappers."

Street Cred—Short for "street credibility." It refers to respect/social capital possessed by a person, as signified by popular opinion emanating from "the streets" within urban environments.