

University of Mississippi

eGrove

Honors Theses

Honors College (Sally McDonnell Barksdale
Honors College)

1-1-2004

The Poetry of a New Generation: An Investigation of the Potential Use of Hip-Hop and Modern Spoken Word in the Classroom

Aaron Lee Thompson
The University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis

Recommended Citation

Thompson, Aaron Lee, "The Poetry of a New Generation: An Investigation of the Potential Use of Hip-Hop and Modern Spoken Word in the Classroom" (2004). *Honors Theses*. 2793.
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/2793

This Undergraduate Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College (Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College) at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

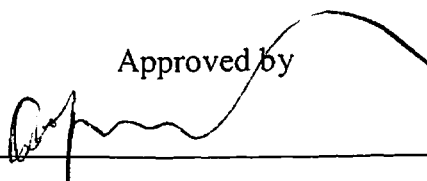
THE POETRY OF A NEW GENERATION: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE
POTENTIAL USE OF HIP-HOP AND MODERN SPOKEN WORD IN THE
CLASSROOM

by
Aaron Lee Thompson

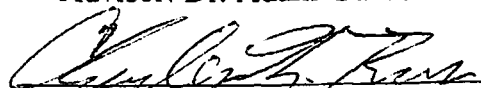
A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors
College.

Oxford
2004

Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Gussow', written over a horizontal line.

Advisor: Dr. Adam Gussow

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles Ross', written over a horizontal line.

Reader: Dr. Charles Ross

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ethel Young-Minor', written over a horizontal line.

Reader: Dr. Ethel Young-Minor

ABSTRACT

AARON L. THOMPSON: *The Poetry of a New Generation: An Investigation of the Potential Use of Hip-Hop and Modern Spoken Word in the Classroom*
(Under the direction of Adam Gussow)

This work will explore the connections between African American Literature and hip-hop culture. It will examine hip-hop music and modern spoken word performance as the newest forms of African American literature. Meanwhile, this thesis will emphasize issues such as the controversy surrounding the possibility of accepting hip-hop and urban spoken word performance as valuable forms of literature.

Chapter One will delve into the origins of both hip-hop music and modern spoken word performance, examining the necessity of the African American community to develop and adapt such art forms into methods of escape and enlightenment to a larger society. Chapter Two will examine the specific works of some noteworthy hip-hop and spoken word artists. It will focus on the major themes and poetic techniques used by these artists, highlighting their ability to use effectively such mechanisms. Chapter Three will place hip-hop and modern spoken word performance in the classroom, ascertaining the benefits and consequences of adding them to the curriculum.

As a whole, this thesis will investigate the background, quality, and potential use of hip-hop and spoken word as forms of poetry. Through discussion of the positive and negative characteristics, it will promote the use of these art forms in the classroom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
CHAPTER I.....	1
CHAPTER II.....	14
CHAPTER III.....	38
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	59

CHAPTER I: THE EMERGENCE OF HIP-HOP AND SPOKEN WORD

Hip-hop music and the closely-related modern spoken word performance, influential in many aspects of society, are now the basis of the newest youth mass following and material for advertisements. Rap, the musical aspect of the broader culture encompassing term “hip-hop”, is at the forefront of a new movement, yet it is seen as highly controversial. Because hip-hop culture has traditionally been condemned for its sometimes rebellious and violent nature, critics argue that it is venomous to contemporary and future generations. However, this essay intends to examine the positive effects of both hip-hop and spoken word performance as art and literary forms with which urban youths identify.

First, it is important that the world of academia recognize these new forms of expression as legitimate forms of literature, and more specifically, poetry. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines poetry as “writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm” (www.m-w.com). As noted by Jerry Quickley, “...hip hop is poetry. All of it. Not all of it is good poetry. But it’s all poetry” (Eleveld 38). Because both hip-hop and spoken word use metaphor, alliteration, emotional appeal, music and other techniques to convey messages, they exhibit characteristics of poetry. If they are, in fact, true forms of poetry, hip-hop and modern spoken word are potential ways of diversifying literature in the classroom.

This essay also intends to analyze spoken word performance by poets and hip-hop artists, noting the literary complexity of specific poems and songs in order to provide a stronger argument for their use in the classroom. By examining the works of hip-hop artists such as Dead Prez, Kanye West, and Tupac Shakur, this essay will embrace the traditionally controversial issues that these artists discuss, in order to propose their potential value in the classroom. Meanwhile, it will make use of the works of slam poetry artists such as Saul Williams by analyzing their use of metaphor, symbolism, and other elements.

In order to understand the importance of hip-hop and spoken word performance it is necessary to examine both the individual and interwoven histories of these forms of expression and how they relate to African American culture. According to DJ Run of Run DMC, rap is one's actual use of voice over music; rap is the idea of rhyming to beats. Hip-hop, however, is the culture surrounding rap music. It includes graffiti art, break dancing, and other rap-related expressions (Conyers 212). These two art forms emerged in the mid to late 1970s in New York City, although rappers commonly dispute the section of the city in which rap music developed.

In the late 1970's DJ Kool Herc, an immigrant from Jamaica, moved to New York City, bringing with him an innovation in music. Kool Herc brought large speakers similar to those used in Jamaican clubs, and introduced a type of music that expanded "...obscure instrumental breaks that created an endless collage of peak dance beats named b-beats or break-beats" (Rose 51). DJ Kool

Herc began to sample instrumentals, composing medleys of rock, jazz, disco, and other genres.

DJ Kool Herc eventually broadened his work with music to include rhyming over the instrumentals. He used a style of poetry developed from prisons and urban radio personalities. Kool Herc's use of music and voice caught on in New York's African American and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. In fact, the Bronx has become known for its legendary rappers and DJs. Kool Herc performed in west Bronx, Afrika Bambaataa in Bronx River East, DJ Breakout in northern Bronx, and Grandmaster Flash in southern and central Bronx (Rose 53).

Although DJ Kool Herc was a major player in the new form of music known as rap, other musicians contributed to what took New York City and America by storm. With the perfection of "scratching", Grandmaster Flash added a new component to rap music. While he did not create it, Grandmaster Flash introduced to urban masses the idea of scratching records with the needle. Also, he created backspinning, a way of repeating music and lyrics whenever desired (Rose 53). In both scratching and backspinning, the DJ was able to use two turntables to play various records against each other. This form of mixing created a new sound and art form. This emerging art form served as a kind of music that represented inner city African Americans. It helped form the framework for a new music aesthetic for African American youths. Instead of aspiring to previous music standards, the young African American generation made their own unique sound, music, and culture.

Through the work of early DJs and their urban audiences, rap, the musical component of hip-hop culture, was born. The DJs contributed new styles of music mixes over which emerging rappers would perform. The music was essential in developing rap, yet it was not the only aspect of the rap. The urban spoken word movement played a major role in promoting rap as a completely new type of music, not just a subset of rock or disco music. Instead of singing to music, hip-hop artists voiced their messages in a more conversational manner, one that they patterned along with the beats.

As rap began to gain popularity in New York, performers presented their work at local schools, clubs, block parties and social outings. They began to compete with each other to gain fame among their neighborhood counterparts. Along with these rap performances, teams competed in break dance contests and DJs challenged each other (Rose 55-56). For African American neighborhoods, rap music was a form of expression that spoke to the young generation; it was tailored to fit the needs of inner-city people who could not fully identify with the mainstream music of that time.

Both rap music and hip-hop culture made their debuts in mainstream American society with the creation of the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" in 1979. This song entered the pop charts and is considered rap's first crossover song (Rose 56). Songs such as "Rapper's Delight" expanded hip-hop from a community-based appreciation of black artistic expression into a national music and culture, one that produced profits similar to those of other kinds of music. "Rapper's Delight" changed hip-hop music, in that it showed the world what

some African Americans had already deemed a useful method of promoting political awareness, education, and entertainment.

However, critics such as the *New York Times* failed to acknowledge rap music's full infiltration of mainstream American society until the mid to late 1980s, when the legendary rap group Run DMC was formed (Rose 58). The New York-based rap group presented lyrics that appealed to both black and white teens. Their crossover hip-hop music included the popular single, "Walk This Way", a collaboration with rock icons Aerosmith. If Run DMC did not start crossover rap, they at least advanced the idea.

Several years later, the creation of hip-hop spread to the West Coast. While hip-hop music was already a nationally recognized phenomenon, there had been a paucity of recorded rappers from regions other than New York. This scarcity, however, changed with the emergence of rappers such as Ice-T, Ice Cube, Eazy-E, and Dr. Dre (Rose 59). These rappers added a new dimension to hip-hop music, one that has proven highly controversial. They created a new sector of hip-hop known as "gangsta rap". Gangsta rap denounced the oppression in which urban African Americans lived while advocating a violent approach toward police and authority figures.

Moreover, the emergence of hip-hop music included another element—female rappers. Although they were present from the beginnings of rap music, female rappers became more influential in the rap industry during the mid to late 1980s. Rappers such as Salt 'n' Pepa, Queen Latifah, and MC Lyte set the stage for a rap style in response to a predominantly male industry. These icons began

creating lyrics that opposed those of famous male rappers. They pointed to the ability of females, affirming the idea that women could rap as well as men. They also condemned male rappers for their sexist lyrics, explaining the necessity of respecting black females (Rose 149). The emergence of female rappers was important because of its symbolic nature. Such artists noted the power of African American women, especially those who rose from urban poverty areas. The new female rappers of the 1980s marked a special period in hip-hop's history. They not only proved the ability of women in artistic expression, they also helped to advance the situation of women in American society. Their lyrics, in effect, provided a form of protest against sexism.

In addition to hip-hop, spoken word is a major force in today's society. Several periods have contributed to the spoken word movement. During the 1920s, poets such as Jean Toomer, Alain Locke, and Langston Hughes gathered for poetry/political discussions (Thomas 189). This combination of topics helped provide a basis for today's spoken word. Perhaps the most important influence on spoken word was poetry from the 1960s and 1970s. Poets who formed groups such as the Beats read their works aloud at cultural and musical gatherings. For example, they read what was deemed jazz poetry (Thomas 198-199). Influenced by such artists, writers like Amiri Baraka contributed to the origin of spoken word art. Baraka's poetry, along with that of other Black Arts Movement poets, helped restructure the aesthetic of black art. They saw poetry for its potential use as a force in political and social change. Amiri Baraka's poetry consists of

“...intensely personal lyrics and incisively political social comment” (Thomas 204). Much of today’s spoken word focuses on such themes.

Although modern spoken word performance seems a bit different than today’s hip-hop music, it does share some of the same origins. Some of today’s spoken word performance derives from oral performances that were also a part of rap’s beginnings. African American poets during the 1960s and 1970s served as a major influence on today’s spoken word artists. People such as the Last Poets, Gil Scott Heron, Douglas “Jocko” Henderson, and actor Rudy Ray Moore gave oral performances that provided a basis for modern spoken word performance (Rose 55). Many “Blaxploitation” films even provided a medium through which African American artists could perform. *Dolemite*, for example, portrays Rudy Ray Moore as a womanizer who controls much of the activity in his neighborhood. His performance of poems such as “The Signifying Monkey” and others was indicative of what was occurring in the African American community at the time. People in real life who recited rhymes in parks, clubs, and other places were the predecessors of spoken word artists.

Spoken word performance today is similar in nature to that of the 1970s. Although it, perhaps, has not reached the zenith of its existence, this form of poetry is becoming increasingly a popular type of poetry. While this type of artistic expression does not necessarily follow in the tradition of commonly praised poetry, it does qualify. Like past poets, spoken word artists use metaphors, alliteration, and other elements used in poetry. However, their subject

matter differs from that of poets such as Eliot and Frost. Unlike others, many spoken word artists discuss issues prevalent in their respective communities. Spoken word artists many times argue for social and political change in their texts, presenting attacks against the system. In addition, many of them speak over musical backgrounds, using hip-hop as a complement to their works. In order to develop a more concrete understanding, it is perhaps beneficial to examine the history of modern spoken word performance.

Although spoken word contributed to the origin of hip-hop music, today's version of spoken word performance is in some ways the direct result of hip-hop music. First, one should note that many people equate the phrase "spoken word" with the coined terms "slam poetry", "performance poetry", and sometimes "hip-hop poetry" (Eleveld and Smith 38,40,41). While slam poetry previously existed, it took on a major change in the 1990's as new poets matured in a hip-hop generation. The new hip-hop twist became what is popularly known as slam poetry. In his essay entitled "Hip-Hop Poetry", Jerry Quickley gives vivid account of the beginning of new spoken word:

...there was a seismic shift that took place at the National Poetry Slam in Portland, Oregon, in 1996. Three of the four members of Team Nuyorican were young black artists, heavily grounded in the work of their peers in hip-hop and for whom hip-hop culture was strongly interwoven in their work. Even the one Asian-American member (Beau Sia) of that year's Nuyorican team, seemed to have his work rooted in a kind of fearless punk rock/ hip hop self-consciousness. MuMs tha' Schema, Jessica Care Moore, and most notably Saul Williams arrived on the national slam stage with a sonic boom (Eleveld and Smith 40).

Quickley's description pinpoints the moment in which hip-hop-influenced poetry became a nationwide phenomenon. He suggests that Team Nuyorican single-handedly brought about slam poetry's current nationwide connection with hip-hop. These poets interweave hip-hop themes and techniques into their works, resulting in a mixture of the two forms of expression. Team Nuyorican was, no doubt, a major player in the construction of today's slam poetry. One concedes the importance of such poets, but in regards to Quickley's essay, one cannot overlook the significance of early hip-hop poets such as Tupac Shakur. With his book "The Rose That Grew From Concrete" Shakur provides solid insight into the hip-hop world via poetry, a point that Quickley neglects to discuss. Shakur discusses issues such as love and death, as seen through the eyes of a member of the hip-hop generation.

Tupac's texts represent the underprivileged, often African American, masses of hip-hop's following. The collection of the rapper's poems proves the ability of rappers to succeed as poets. He writes about captivity and poverty while using metaphors to describe his existence. For instance, the title poem of the collection parallels his life with a rose's survival in the inner city. The artist's contribution to poetry, if nothing else, blurs the line between poetry and hip-hop.

Furthermore, Quickley's essay delves into another major event in the short history of modern spoken word. During the 1990s Paul Devlin produced a documentary called *SlamNation* that showed the nation the events of that year's National Poetry Slam. Not only did the film provide exposure for the individual artists, it also helped to contribute to the mass awareness concerning spoken word.

The film, in particular, highlights the talent of Saul Williams, one of spoken word's most famous artists. Because of Devlin's *SlamNation*, the public, not just avid poetry followers, had the opportunity to experience the fusion of hip-hop mentality with poetry (Eleveld and Smith 41). He identifies with the drugs, poverty, and other issues with which rappers concern themselves.

Quickley explains the difference between hip-hop and poetry, a distinction that allows for the inclusion of all rappers as poets (although not necessarily good ones, as he notes), but does not allow for the inclusion of all poets as hip-hop poets. According to Quickley, there are strict guidelines for being called a hip-hop slam artist. One uses the rhythm, free verse, metaphors, and/or whatever other aspects of poetry he deems necessary, but he must also mold his written and performed styles into distinctiveness while maintaining his own identity (Eleveld and Smith 41-42). Saul Williams' use of the beat box, urban themes, DJ sounds, rapper rhyme schemes, and his quoting rap lyrics provide examples of methods for writing and performing hip-hop poetry.

Like hip-hop, spoken word is a type of art with many subcategories. One must note that not all spoken word artists are hip-hop artists, nor do all hip-hop artists aspire to produce profound poetry. Some simply desire the obvious monetary benefits of the multi-million dollar hip hop industry. Spoken word artists, on the other hand, in the past, have had no financial benefits in mind. Their work seems to have been a passion more than a hobby. Quickley does assert, however, that as spoken word becomes more marketable, the hip-hop generation is beginning to see it for its monetary benefits (Eleveld and Smith 42).

Like hip-hop, spoken word varies and comes from all regions. Some artists discuss their lives as African Americans, while others provide insight into their experiences as Latin Americans, Asian Americans, and Caucasians. There are famous hip-hop poets from Los Angeles, New York, and various areas between the two. Both hip-hop music and spoken word are proving dynamic in nature.

Also, Russell Simmons' *Def Poetry Jam* has been noteworthy for its effects on the popularity of spoken word performance. The idea originated as a series of poetry performances on HBO. It eventually expanded to an innovative Broadway performance, one that helped increase the popularity of spoken word to a mainstream audience. In anticipation of the project, Executive Producer Danny Simmons predicted, "*Def Poetry Jam* will raise the hip-hop nation to a higher level of consciousness. Spoken word is one of the most powerful forces of social change" (www.defpoetryjam.com). As explained by poets and followers, hip-hop and spoken word have a clear connection. Projects such as *Def Poetry Jam* have made mainstream America more aware of the realistic side of poetry in contemporary society. The poets use their works to attest to the problematic society in which they live, many times advocating change. For instance, the poets' collaborative effort, "I Write America" represents their attempts to call attention to the power of the word and the failures of the government in foreseeing events such as the September 11 tragedies. *Def Poetry Jam* seems to have served as the crossover for hip-hop poetry; it resembles the crossover ability of such groups as Sugar Hill Gang and Run DMC in hip-hop music's history.

As shown, hip-hop music and spoken word performance have similar beginnings. Although the two forms of expression have their own respective characteristics, they share certain aspects such as the importance of oral expression. Hip-hop music and spoken word have proven two of the newest and most popular forms of expression for the African American hip-hop generation. As with their origins, the two art forms both focus on the expression of largely African American experiences. However, with the national exposure of both, they are becoming more multicultural. Both hip-hop music and slam poetry have evolved to include much of society, while many of the individual artists continue to explain and teach the experiences of the African American community.

**CHAPTER II: TUPAC SHAKUR AND SAUL WILLIAMS AS
POTENTIAL POETS FOR THE CLASSROOM**

Hip-hop music and spoken word performance have proven to be major movements, especially in the African American community. As forms of literature, both contribute to the portrayal of African American triumphs and problems that past African American literature has addressed. This chapter will focus on two of the most noteworthy artists in the hip-hop and modern spoken word movements, Tupac Shakur and Saul Williams. Although there are many important poets in both categories, Tupac Shakur and Saul Williams have been arguably two of the most influential recent poets in their respective careers. Shakur, who is considered one of hip-hop's most politically-conscious minds, and Saul Williams, who has enhanced the popularity of spoken word through his wordplay, slam poetry, and hip-hop-influenced poetry, are considered two of the most well known artists in their movements.

First, this chapter looks to examine the background from which Tupac emerges, and his relevance to contemporary literature. After developing an understanding of Tupac's culture and career, this work will analyze several of the artist's lyrics, noting their importance in the classroom. A discussion of several lyrics from Tupac's volume of poetry, *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, will provide further evidence of the value of his work.

Next, this chapter will focus on the spoken word performance of Saul Williams. It will explain Williams' rise to fame, and why he is important to the spoken word movement. After examining Williams' recent career, this chapter

will look at his lyrics in his most recent work, *„said the shotgun to the head*, examining the techniques he uses and evaluating their potential for classroom use.

Tupac Shakur: Political Awareness and Hip-Hop Revolutionary

Tupac Shakur is one of hip-hop's most influential artists because of his life, intelligence, political ideas, and his ability to capture the attention of predominantly African American masses. His life shaped the way he thought, which in turn affected his lyrics. Shakur's troubled background made him a figure with which many people in rap audiences could identify.

Tupac Shakur was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1971. He was raised as the son of a revolutionary, a fact that would later have a major impact on his life (Jackson and Richardson 193). Tupac's mother was a member of the Black Panther Party, a group that surrounded Tupac during his early life. In fact, his godfather was Panther Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt (Dyson 48). Shakur's mother, Afeni Shakur instilled in him the beliefs of the Black Panthers, including the idea of black nationalism. Proud despite the financial impact of his mother's philosophy, Tupac says, "We're just poor because our ideals get in the way, 'cause we're not 'yup-yup' people" (Dyson 51).

As a youth, Tupac Shakur even considered himself an activist. He agreed with some the Panther ideas, but some of his behavior also went against Black Panther beliefs. For example, he was torn between Panther anti-capitalist ideas and what he saw in everyday life. Tupac saw Black Panther leaders who argued against capitalism, but lived according to this way of life. According to Dyson,

“...some of the party’s chief icons lived luxuriously, even dissolutely, at the expense of the proletarian rank and file” (Dyson 55). Eventually, Tupac decided that it was not wrong to live in a capitalist society, but he still maintained ideas of black nationalism. He believed in the principles of self-help within the African American community, but he also acknowledged a need for the individual to earn for himself. Tupac’s perception of the society surrounding him was a cynical one. He felt that there was much wrong with the American government and structure of the nation, a prominent theme in his rap lyrics.

In addition to discussing the direct influence of the Black Panthers on Tupac Shakur’s life, Michael Eric Dyson notes how his strong beliefs carried over to all aspects of life:

If Tupac demanded that his revolutionary forbears consider the consequences of their failed practices, he also challenged artistic communities and the entertainment industry to face up to their equally heinous contradictions[...]It was evident from the start of his fledgling career that Tupac wasn’t simply play-acting the part of a revolutionary, even if his excesses sometimes made him appear extreme, even self-destructive (Dyson 58).

Clearly, Tupac had a passion for being a leader. Determined to end the “...poverty, murder, violence...” in the African American community, Shakur declares “...my heart will not exist/ unless my destiny comes through/ and puts an end 2 all of this” (Shakur 11). Although he may have carried negative views of some power structures, such as the police, he argued for what he believed to be right.

Beyond the Black Panther Party, other factors impacted Tupac Shakur’s involvement in rap music. He attended a performing arts school while living in

Baltimore, and throughout his younger years he wrote his own plays and adaptations of popular plays. He developed an interest in acting and literature in general (Dyson 72-73). His love for entertainment and literature became focal points for his life as he aspired to become a rapper.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy characteristics of Tupac Shakur is his intelligence. In considering his works as relevant to the classroom, it is important to reinforce the poet's credibility by examining his intellectual background. Tupac Shakur was forced to drop out of high school because of homelessness and his mother's addiction to drugs (Dyson 71). However, his lack of formal education was not indicative of his intelligence and knowledge.

Michael Eric Dyson's *Holler If You Hear Me* discusses Tupac's friendship with Leila Steinberg, his mentor and manager. The chapter entitled "No Malcolm X in My History Text" reveals the extent of Tupac's desire to learn. According to several people, including Leila Steinberg, Tupac was an avid reader. He read the works of Shakespeare, Orwell, Vonnegut, Freud, Dubois, Baraka and many other noteworthy authors (Dyson 94-99). It is significant that Dyson stresses Tupac Shakur's connection with such a variety of authors, because it points to an aspect of hip-hop that critics do not necessarily acknowledge. Tupac's understanding of these works underscores the idea that he was conscious of politics and literature, not simply a rap artist.

After becoming a member of Digital Underground, a nationally-known rap group in the early 1990s, Tupac released his first album as a solo artist. The 1991

album *2Pacalypse Now* showed a serious side of the rapper; it proved characteristic of his rapping style on future albums (Powell 134).

2Pacalypse Now consisted of several hit songs, including “Brenda”, a song about the plight of an African American female. After gaining an audience with *2Pacalypse Now*, Tupac starred in several movies such as the 1992 film *Juice* (Powell 133). The artist enhanced his popularity in black communities with his 1993 album, *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* This album contributed “Holler If Ya Hear Me,” one of the most widely recognized of Tupac’s songs. *Strictly* emphasized the artist’s experiences as a young African American male, proposing a resistance to the sectors of society that he argues have been detrimental to African American communities (Powell 135-137).

Amid struggles with the law, Tupac Shakur released his 1995 album, *Me Against the World*. This album, which included the tribute “Dear Mama,” was his last before being shot five times while in New York. Afterward, he served time in a correctional facility. The last album he released while alive was *All Eyez on Me*, reported to be hip-hop’s first double album. In 1996, Tupac was shot and later died from his wounds. He died as one of hip-hop’s most respected artists (Powell 164-165).

Several authors discuss Tupac’s relevance to both the hip-hop world and society as a whole. They acknowledge his downfalls, namely his advocacy of violence in order to affect change, but they are also able to see the virtues of Tupac’s works. The authors look at the poet’s works in ways that suggest their potential usefulness in the classroom.

As an artist to be considered as a poet in the classroom, Tupac can best be described by Michael E. Dyson's observation:

Those big eyes and the world they envisioned made Tupac the hip-hop James Baldwin: an excruciatingly conscientious scribe whose narratives flamed with moral outrage at black suffering (Dyson 47).

Clearly, some followers see Tupac Shakur for his positive contributions to the world in which he lived. He was an outspoken leader who passionately expressed his perspective on society and how to improve it. Followers such as Dyson see Tupac's anger at "...black suffering" as necessary in order to benefit African Americans.

In his discussion of the usefulness of Tupac's works, Kenneth Carroll acknowledges the existence of negative aspects, such as his disrespect for women in some cases (Carroll C1). For example, his songs such as "Wonder Why They Call U Bitch" are representative of his disrespect for women. However, the author notes the importance of songs like "Keep Ya Head Up" in black communities. Tupac's lines in "Keep Ya Head Up" show both his suffering and his motivational approaches to overcoming this suffering:

[...]last night my buddy lost his whole family
it's gonna take the man in me to conquer this insanity
it seems the rain'll never let up
I try to keep my head up (Carroll C1).

In the above excerpt, Tupac explains that he suffers like his audience, but he will not give up because of these misfortunes. Tupac's positive lyrics help to unite and inspire his predominately African American listeners to seek better lives. His virtues and vices are highly visible to listeners and scholars alike. In fact, another

article about Tupac's impact on black culture echoes Carroll's discussion of Tupac as a poet. Mikal Gilmore underscores the idea that the artist rapped about the violence he lived, which in turn brought about his demise (Gilmore 41-49). According to Gilmore, Tupac "...made a certain element of the rap world genuinely dangerous by embodying the ideal that 'real' rappers had to live the lethal lives they sang about" (Gilmore 49). However, the author, like Carroll, notes that Tupac's music is useful for some of its elements, factors such as inspiration, action, and education.

The problem of hip-hop in the classroom is evident in the lyrics of Tupac Shakur. While at times he proposes peace within the community, social action, and political change, he seems to contradict himself in other lyrics (Jackson and Richardson 194). The idea that Tupac is representative of rappers as a whole is a problem, because the violence around him does affect the subject matter of his lyrics. Since many rappers like Tupac Shakur have gang ties or connections with violence, it is difficult for followers to equate such leaders with positive themes.

Some critics of the hip-hop and spoken word argue that they are not representative of the essence of black America, and that these art forms should not be seen as such (McWhorter 65). According to critics such as John McWhorter, rappers and spoken word poets are not as useful as one would think. He argues that they convey more rage than an actual message to society. McWhorter acknowledges the presence and popularity of hip-hop and spoken word, but he denounces them for the negative elements common among some of the artists.

McWhorter condemns poets such as Black Ice from the Def Poetry Jam Broadway performance for their cynicism regarding the society in which they live. As the poets explain why they "...write America...", according to McWhorter, Black Ice says he only watches America. Black Ice explains his theory of the government's involvement in the September 11, 2001 attacks (McWhorter 64). McWhorter, who is apparently opposed to this point of view, condemns cynics like Black Ice.

Contrary to cynical views of rap and spoken word, the music of Tupac Shakur was instrumental in helping to set the trend of hip-hop's direction. In order for hip-hop to be a meaningful effort to aid African American communities, it is necessary for rappers to focus on positive ideas relevant to the neighborhoods from which they come. Bakari Kitwana explains, "Until hip-hop is recognized as a broad cultural movement, rather than simply an influential moneymaker, those who seek to tap into hip-hop's potential to impact social change should not expect substantive progress" (Kitwana 206).

The idea that artists need to make themselves aware of the social issues surrounding them is significant. Critics of hip-hop music see its economic potential, but point to the need for a cultural movement to be sustained as a part of the movement. Kitwana provides examples of the Haitian Refugee Crisis, the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal (who was accused of murdering a policeman), and The Million Man March as struggles in which rappers have previously involved themselves (Kitwana 206-208). Hip-hop as a political message for the community is the focus of much of Tupac's music. Kitwana, along with other

critics, does not condemn the music for its economic benefits. Such positive characteristics of hip-hop culture should be used, instead, to help advance the communities from which the rappers arise.

Kitwana's statement suggests that some of Tupac's lyrics would be practical in developing a true understanding of the essence of hip-hop in the classroom. Teachers would use lyrics relevant to the classroom and the students, not simply all of the rapper's work. Topics such as the effects of excessive materialism, violence, or the importance of education would prove relevant to students' lives. In order for the use of hip-hop to be positive and practical in the community, Kitwana expresses the idea that followers need to focus on the artists' messages about social change.

Tupac Shakur's posthumously published volume of poetry, *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, provides examples of the variety of subjects the artist discussed in his lyrics. By selecting five of the artist's works from *Rose*, this work seeks to examine the subject matter and style of the artist's poems. In examining each work, this chapter will make note of the depth and potential use of Tupac's works in the classroom.

Tupac Shakur's poem entitled "The Rose That Grew From Concrete" deals with the harsh urban environment surrounding the artist. In this poem, he uses a rose to represent his own blossoming as an artist. He explains that by growing through the concrete the rose accomplishes a feat considered impossible to many (Shakur 2). This poem, which the poet subtitles "Autobiographical",

juxtaposes nature with man's invention. To Tupac, all things natural are a metaphor for positive forces in life. However, the concrete symbolizes struggles and how they become obstacles he has to overcome.

The artist seems to represent the view that he lives in a society that cannot or will not help him. He proclaims his own fortitude and desire to survive his problems, exclaiming " Long live the rose that grew from concrete/ when no one else ever cared!" (Shakur 2). One senses the poet's feelings of isolation, emotions that the poet expresses with an air of independence. The poet exudes pride in how he has overcome the poverty, drugs, and violence in his life.

Meanwhile, the poem shows a style indicative of many of Tupac's works. Throughout the volume of poetry, the artist uses "2" instead of "to", "two", or "too." He also uses the number four in place of "for" (Shakur). This style, while clearly not grammatically correct, represents the artist's ties with hip-hop culture. He conveys the idea that it acceptable to stray from the norm. Shakur does not find it necessary to follow mainstream society's rules in his creative art. Like Black Arts poets, he uses creative spelling variations. For instance, his alternative writing is comparable to that of poets like Sonia Sanchez, who used nonstandard spellings to write "blk" instead of "black" and "shd" instead of "should" (Redmond 365). In addition, Tupac's use of metaphor is seen in many of his works, and is perhaps the most notable characteristic of his poetry. As a rose is used in "The Rose That Grew From Concrete", he uses similar references in other poems.

In addition to the above poem, one of Tupac's noteworthy works is an untitled poem. The poem begins:

Please wake me when I'm free
I cannot bear captivity
where my culture I'm told holds no significance
I'll wither and die in ignorance
But my inner eye can c a race
who reigned as kings in another place
the green of trees were rich and full
and every man spoke of beautiful[...] (Shakur 14).

This work likens the artist's life to what he considers bondage. He discusses society's ownership of his life, and his perception of how society views him. Tupac's use of culture is significant in "Untitled" because the poem focuses on the contrast between African American existence and previous civilizations in Africa. Without specifically making reference to "America" or "Africa", he holds the former to be a place of captivity and the latter a place of opportunity. Such writing resembles that of some Black Arts writers' desires to reclaim African characteristics over American ones.

He uses nature to represent a romanticized Africa, discussing the beauty of the environment and the social position of the people in Africa. While the Africa that Tupac discusses may not exist, for him it is a world of escape from the poverty in which he lives.

Also, he continues to use vernacular speech in this poem. Along with the use of the digits two and four, he uses "c" in place of the verb "see" (Shakur 14). Such improvised spellings of words are representative of hip-hop culture, although they are derived from early African American use of vernacular in writing. This poem shows what has become a well-known technique throughout

hip-hop history. As “Untitled” continues, the use of metaphor is extended. The poet points out the need to express himself freely, something he feels he cannot do in his current state of captivity.

Tupac’s use of captivity is a metaphor for his life as an African American, which proves an interesting idea, considering the commonly held idea that America is a place of freedom. One empathizes with the poet’s idea that he is living in some sort of captivity, even if it is not literally slavery. Tupac’s commitment to what he considers his struggle is evidenced by his final declaration that he will do whatever necessary in order to avoid society’s silencing his form of expression (Shakur 14).

Moreover, Tupac’s poetry also deals with worldwide politics. In his discussion of the society in which he lives he also notes what occurs in the lives of others. His “Just a Breath of Freedom” is dedicated to Nelson Mandela, the South African political leader who was imprisoned for his anti-apartheid beliefs. This poem uses the same vernacular and references to nature as the above poems, but it seems more specific in its relation to the world in which we live.

The poem “Just a Breath of Freedom” salutes the political leader for his determination while condemning the outsiders that imprisoned him. This work is the written equivalent of message rap, hip-hop that confronts the social and political issues of one’s community. The poem begins by explaining how South African authorities unjustly murdered citizens because of they were unable to change the people’s beliefs. Tupac writes, “...They wanted 2 break your soul/ They ordered the extermination/ of all the minds they couldn’t control...” (Shakur

104). He then contrasts the death sentence with Nelson Mandela's punishment, which he deems far worse. Nelson Mandela's imprisonment, for the poet, represents what is done to an animal. He is clearly angry about the establishment's treatment of Mandela, but he feels that through determination his hero will overcome his punishment.

Tupac's political awareness is shown in this dedication to Nelson Mandela. Although it is not clear exactly when the poem was written, Tupac's death at a young age makes it clear that he was still young when he wrote this poem. This work shows him to be politically conscious, even though he was still young. The idea that he, who had been the victim of poverty, drugs, and violence, maintained a grasp of political occurrences worldwide suggests a representative of hip-hop that could potentially inspire many students of similar circumstances.

In spite of some critics' condemning Tupac as a negative influence on youths, his poem ends in a positive light. He looks to God to determine Mandela's future, and says the authorities at the prison will be punished for their actions (Shakur 104). Even though he is cynical about the government, he feels that justice will somehow prevail.

Tupac's environment is further evidenced in the poem titled "U R Ripping Us Apart!!!," a work that the artist dedicates to "crack." (Shakur 122). This work is significant because it is one with which many students from impoverished neighborhoods can relate. Tupac uses personification to describe the drug and its effect on his life:

Before u came the triangle never broke
we were bonded and melded as one

But as the 2 pushed u away
The one got weak and embraced u
and now u R ripping us apart[...] (Shakur 122).

The poem begins in a calm explanatory manner, discussing the poet's life before the drug's dominance. The triangle represents his family, which consists of Tupac, his mother, and his sister. As he and his sister refuse drugs, his mother falls victim to crack. He holds a conversation with the drug, explaining its impact as if it were a human capable of understanding. His "...one got weak..." reference seems to represent his mother's addiction to drugs (Shakur 123). However, this stanza is also relevant to crack's presence in American society and particularly its impoverished neighborhoods.

The poem continues with a sense of desperation that crack has bestowed upon the speaker. The poet expresses the idea that he cannot overcome the obstacle that stands before him this time. According to the poem, the person with whom he most closely identifies has become the drug's victim.

The final stanza of "U R Ripping Us Apart!!!" conveys a sense of urgency and anger that is not shown in the beginning of the poem. The speaker exclaims:

I know the worst is here
I feel it in my Heart
u got into the circle
now you're tearing us apart !!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (Shakur 122).

The speaker is overwhelmed by what drugs have done to his environment. The "circle" of which he speaks symbolizes the family as a single unit. One cannot help but understand the extent to which drugs affect the poet. Tupac's use of the multiple exclamation marks shows his attempt to provide the most accurate

representation possible of his perspective. The exclamation points work to underscore his anger and frustration at how drugs have torn his family apart.

“U R Ripping Us Apart!!!” could be useful in the classroom because it is the perfect example of what Tupac would consider necessary education. The poem lacks the romanticized description of society that is a part of some works, but it provides an understanding of the misfortunes of some people’s lives. According to Tupac’s response to a question when only seventeen years old, “There should be a class on apartheid. There should be a class on racism. There should be a class on why people are hungry” (Dyson 77). This poem represents what Tupac felt to be part of a practical education in the classroom. He was interested in classes that would discuss the experience of students from underprivileged backgrounds. By examining the negative aspects of what is reality for students similar to Tupac, classes would provide the students with an understanding of the need to overcome obstacles of life in America’s ghettos.

Tupac’s poetry addresses another significant issue: the approach of his own death. One of the artist’s most famous poems from *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, “In The Event Of My Demise” has come to represent the poetic side of Tupac Shakur for many of his fans. The poem, which foreshadows his own death, is symbolic of his perspective on life. Although it is a short one-stanza poem, the work is perhaps the most powerful of Tupac’s written poetry:

In the event of my Demise
when my heart can beat no more
I Hope I Die For A Principle
or A Belief that I had lived 4
I will die Before my Time
Because I feel the Shadow’s Depth

so much I wanted 2 accomplish
Before I reached my Death
I have come 2 grips with the possibility
and wiped the last tear from my eyes
I Loved All who were Positive
In the event of my Demise! (Shakur 150)

The poem seems ironic because of Tupac's early death. It is not clear whether he made such an assumption based on the dangerous life he lived, or whether this was written because of specific information about his approaching demise.

The poem is dedicated "2 Those curious", which presumably consists of Tupac's group of listeners and critics. The idea that the speaker is only concerned with dying for his beliefs suggests his dedication to his cause. He shows his depth in his willingness to die as a martyr in order to teach others.

The artist's predicting his own early death is sadly ironic, because it seems dangerously similar to what occurred in reality. Although Tupac discusses a sad event, he ends on a positive note, as in many of his works. His declaration that he is prepared to die provides a sense of satisfaction, because the artist himself has no fear of his inevitable fate. The speaker's final statement that he loved all who were positive about his death shows more of Tupac's perspective (Shakur 150). He apparently wants his followers and critics to celebrate his life, especially when he dies.

One of the significant stylistic approaches in "Demise" is the poet's use of past tense, particularly in the second half of the poem. The speaker says "...so much I wanted 2 accomplish..." and "...I Loved All who were Positive...", making the lyrics seem spoken from beyond the grave. This style adds to the experience because one realizes that the speaker is now deceased.

In addition to the use of past tense, this work also exhibits a balanced rhyme. While some of Tupac's poetry from this volume is unrhymed, this poem rhymes every two lines. Even though the artist may choose to use blank verse or free verse in other works, he is clearly capable of following a rhyme scheme while conveying his theme.

As a poet, Tupac Shakur offered more than his rap songs. Although his songs typically showed a hard-core style, his lyrics in *A Rose That Grew From Concrete* show a more sentimental side of his personality. Tupac's volume of poetry presents him as a more traditional poet because of the lack of profanity and violence in his lyrics. It seems more suitable for the classroom because the reader sees some of the same ideas (poverty, drugs, death, etc.), minus the most controversial factors (profanity and violence).

After examining several of the artist's works, there is no question that Tupac Shakur, a rapper, can also be viewed as a poet. However, if Tupac's works are included in a classroom curriculum, is it possible to use the lyrics of other rappers? Because Tupac Shakur is used solely as an example of what hip-hop represents, there are several artists who use their own stylistic approaches in discussing subject matter that they would deem important for listeners and students.

Saul Williams: Icon of Hip-Hop Related Spoken Word

Along with the significance of hip-hop as a potential classroom tool, one must also note the presence of modern spoken word performance. Several key

poets have risen to fame in the hip-hop and spoken word arenas, many of them possessing unquestionable talent in creating and presenting poetry. Of the modern spoken word poets, Saul Williams has become an important name. This work now looks to examine his background and influences on spoken word.

Saul Williams was born in Newburgh, New York in 1972. His father was a preacher and his mother was a teacher (www.annonline.com). Williams developed a passion for poetry at a young age, and wrote his own lyrics as a youth. After earning a B.A. degree in philosophy at Morehouse College, he returned to New York. In New York City, Saul Williams attended New York University as a participant of a master's program in acting (www.annonline.com).

While participating in the acting program, Williams attended cafes in New York and recited his poetry. His style, different from that commonly used in classrooms, is heavily influenced by hip-hop music and culture. In an interview, Williams discusses how hip-hop influenced the beginnings of his poetry. He explains, "I was young and susceptible to some new shit, and hip-hop was the new shit of my era" (www.slamnation.com). According to the artist, he eventually became disillusioned with hip-hop's presence in the industry. In the interview, explains that hip-hop formulas have become trite.

As an artist, Saul Williams adds a new characteristic to hip-hop and spoken word. He is not a typical hip-hop artist, yet he is not only a spoken word artist. In 1996, Williams began his march to fame as he became Nuyorican Poet Cafe's Grand Slam Champion (www.annonline.com). As he emerged as a spoken word artist, he also brought a hip-hop following.

In 1998, Saul Williams played the lead role in *Slam*, a film about the spoken word movement. In the movie, he plays a prisoner who develops an understanding of poetry and its significance (www.annonline.com). The movie gained much attention, and because of it, America began to focus more on spoken word performance as a major movement with connections to hip-hop.

Williams uses his interactions with hip-hop to empower his arguments and subject matter. He explains that hip-hop is arguably one of the most powerful forces in contemporary American society. Williams says that the significance of hip-hop lies in both its worldwide popularity and its artists' techniques. According to Williams, artists such as Jay-z and Eminem are hailed as the best rappers because they are able to sound as if they are simply conversing and rhyming by accident. He says that they do the opposite of artists who focus on rhyming at the expense of their lyrics' quality (www.hiphopcongress.com). While Saul Williams does not consider himself a rapper or a spoken word artist, he does exhibit qualities of both. His works include *The Seventh Octave*, *SHE*, *.said the shotgun to the head*, and several published interviews and articles in *The New York Times*, *Details*, *Esquire*, *Bomb Magazine*, and *African Voices*.

Saul Williams' poetry concerns itself with issues such as his identity as an urban African American male. "Amethyst Rocks", one of his most famous works, addresses the experience of what appears to be an inner city African American speaker. The poet describes his life using street terminology, yet he uses the terminology to express ideas of nature and African culture.

Williams writes:

i stand on the corner of the block slingin'
amethyst rocks
drinkin' 40s of Mother Earth's private nectar
stock

dodgin' cops
'cause five-O are the 666[...] (Eleveld and Smith 55).

He continues:

i bring the sunshine and the moon
and the wind blows my tune
...meanwhile
i spoon powdered drum beats into plastic bags
sellin' kilos of kente scag[...] (Eleveld and Smith 55).

Williams' poetry confronts some of the same issues as Tupac's poetry. Although his style is more abstract, Williams likens his existence to that of drug dealers. Instead of harming the community, however, the speaker is enjoying the natural environment that surrounds him.

To fully understand Williams' theme, one must understand the significance of his references. The speaker says "i stand on the corner of the block slingin' / amethyst rocks / drinkin' 40s of Mother Earth's private nectar / stock..." (Eleveld and Smith 55). Amethyst is "a purple quartz or corundum used as a gem" (Funk and Wagnalls 21). In ancient times, the wearing of amethyst rocks were thought to prevent drunkenness (Funk and Wagnalls 22). Williams uses these as symbols for what he gives his audience. He is advocating the use of knowledge instead of poisons such as alcohol. Like amethyst rocks, Williams can prevent a form of drunkenness (i.e., the African American community's unawareness) through his poetry.

Furthermore, the speaker portrays the police as an enemy. He does not see authorities for what they are supposed to represent. The speaker does not see an idealized police force, he sees them for the negative impacts they have had on his life. The “five-O”, or police, are the “666”, the sign of the devil (Eleveld and Smith 55). Next, he explains his contribution to society as a drug-like substance. His putting “...powdered drum beats into plastic bags...” and “...sellin’ kilos of kente scag...” are his contributions to the quality of music and his desire to reclaim Africa. Williams, like Shakur, portrays Africa as a romantic place. The speaker acknowledges the significance of Africa through his references to kente and drums (Eleveld and Smith 55). He sees his contribution to his community as a benefit.

Saul Williams also presents an interesting style in the structure of his poetry. In “Amethyst Rocks,” he does not use capital letters to begin thoughts, nor does he spell “I” with a capital letter. The lack of capital letters, especially with regard to “I”, suggests that the speaker is not trying to call attention to himself as an individual. Although it is open to interpretation, it is possible that “i” is used to represent a collective group, such as African Americans.

“Amethyst Rocks,” like other works, is significant in that its lines allow for various points of discussion. The use of vernacular, lack of capitalization, and metaphors show the poem to be more than what it first seems. Because of the poem’s relevance to the lives of some students, it would provide variety in the curriculum. Some students would be able to identify with references to hip-hop

and cultural issues that the speaker addresses, while others would benefit from exposure to a different sector of society.

Saul Williams' hip-hop inspired poetry is easily visible through his use of references to hip-hop music. His lines express emotion as seen through the eyes of a member of the hip-hop generation. In *,said the shotgun to the head*, he discusses a woman in this manner:

she had eyes
like two turntables
mix(h)er
in between
my dreams and reality
blend in
ancient themes
the bass is of isis
(basis)
cross-faded to ankh
the beat drops
like a cliff
over-looking
my heart[...] (Williams 44-45).

Williams' use of metaphor in comparing DJ terminology to a woman is innovative. He uses words that are common among avid followers of hip-hop. Terms such as "mix(h)er", "bass", "cross-faded", and "beat" reinforce hip-hop as a source of comparison.

The genius of Williams is in this case his creativity, because he effectively merges separate ideas. The speaker juxtaposes a female with hip-hop, and reality with imagination, while narrating what appears to be a love story. The excerpt from *,said the shotgun* resembles other poetry because the speaker expresses himself in metaphors; however, the use of hip-hop is a concept not common in textbook poetry.

Poetry like the above excerpt seems practical for use in schools because it does not use profanity or violence, but retains some characteristics for which poets have been praised. Saul Williams' poetry brings to the forefront a form of expression similar to past poets' use of the blues and jazz. Like Langston Hughes' poems such as "The Weary Blues", Williams expresses himself through reference to a music popular during his lifetime. With such observations, one wonders how long hip-hop's presence can be denied in the classroom.

Despite the idea that some critics may not agree with poets' subject matter or points of view, it seems necessary to at least respect their opinions. McWhorter's argument against the subject matter and perspectives of rappers and spoken word artists does effectively protest the use of such poetry in classrooms. However, because diversity is an important factor in education, one might argue that it is beneficial to present to students multiple perceptions of the society in which they live.

Although some of the lyrics of artists such as Tupac Shakur and Saul Williams are controversial, the artists have much to contribute. Their characteristics in common with past poets and their own stylistic approaches provide types of poetry that are innovative. Because the two are chosen simply as representatives of their respective movements, one can only imagine the texts that other rappers and spoken word poets have to offer.

**CHAPTER III: HIP-HOP AND SPOKEN WORD USE IN THE
CLASSROOM**

Hip-hop and spoken word have become influential in virtually all sectors of life, particularly in American society. While the two are largely praised for their impact on the entertainment world, it is important to examine their use as educational tools for the classroom.

Hip-hop and spoken word will provide a unique resource for teachers, one that will facilitate interaction between students and teachers. Through these forms of expression, the teachers will learn to identify with the music and poetry of the hip-hop generation, while the students will use these forms of poetry as text for analysis. This chapter intends to examine cases in which teachers have used hip-hop and modern spoken word performance. Through discussion of texts about the methods, results, and critical reception of such classroom curricula, Chapter Three will promote the use of the two art forms in education.

Perhaps it is beneficial to begin with the emergence of hip-hop as a crossover phenomenon. When rap music began to become popular among African American, Latino, and Caucasian audiences of the MTV generation, it became a way of interacting with students. Although it is controversial for the violence and profanity in some lyrics, it can be used as a tool to teach students. With the beginning of presenting rap lyrics in the classroom, many people were concerned with what the lyrics would suggest to students. In her 1993 article “Rap: Tool or Trouble”, Anita Merina discusses both the positive impacts in the classroom and the negative aspects that worry parents and teachers. “Adults are

often stunned—and outraged—when they hear rap lyrics that encourage violence, or that contain sexist or racist comments and sexually explicit language” (Merina 18). This argument against hip-hop in the classroom, however, should not prevent teachers from using all rap lyrics. The author argues for the use of positive lyrics, ones that will make the students aware of America’s history and the political issues surrounding them. Merina advocates rap music as an educational tool because, as she says, “Whether we like it or not, rap music is here to stay, but we can teach kids to analyze it. We can even teach them to use it in a positive way” (Merina 18).

In his discussion with Merina, former teacher Peter Brown says “This music is about power, it’s about communication” (Merina 18). The author points out that rap music is useful because it will quickly obtain the students attention. Because many of the students already listen to rap music outside of school, they will want to hear it. Students will identify with this teaching tool because it is a major part of their everyday lives. Student interaction with hip-hop as a part of their own culture is only one way in which the text will be used.

Brown explains hip-hop’s potential for uniting cultures. Although hip-hop began as a predominately African American art, it has since evolved. Because there are rappers from various cultures, students from different backgrounds will relate to the music. By bringing the texts of diverse rappers such as Latino artist Fat Joe, Chinese rapper Jin, and Caucasian rapper Eminem into the classroom, teachers can present texts representative of several cultures. By appealing to all cultures, the teachers will be able to hold the students’ interest. While students

may not be able to identify with the characters of traditional education, hip-hop and spoken word will provide a medium through which they can see people like themselves.

In addition, Merina's article notes other ways in which teachers can use rap lyrics. According to teacher Karima Amin, music deemed "message rap" is important for the classroom. During the era in hip-hop in which the article was published, she used the lyrics of groups such as Arrested Development and KRS1 to make her students politically and socially aware (Merina 18). Although these rappers, who were major in 1993, are no dominant in hip-hop, they represent a movement that still exists in today's hip-hop and spoken word. Politically active message rappers like Public Enemy have been replaced by today's groups like Dead Prez. Dead Prez's songs such as "They Schools" and "Police State" are similar in argument to Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." As successors of early 1990s political rappers, groups like Dead Prez promote political consciousness.

The message rap that Amin uses in her classes can be paralleled to the works of artists like Tupac and Saul Williams discussed in the previous chapter. The two artists are symbolic of a movement that goes against the grain of materialistic values.

Today's new artists, such as producer and rapper Kanye West, provide a message that seeks to enlighten audiences about issues like materialism and racial injustices endured by African Americans. In his debut album, *The College Dropout*, West discusses how a materialistic America has destroyed the African American community. In "All Falls Down", he writes:

We shine because they hate us floss because they degrade us
We tryin to buy back our 40 acres[...]
I say fuck the police that's how I treat em
We buy our way out of jail but we can't buy freedom[...] (West 5).

West sees materialism in the black community as a reaction to racial oppression. His "...tryin to buy back our 40 acres..." explains material wealth as an attempt to right the wrongs of slavery. However, he quickly notes the limitations of financial wealth, saying "We buy our way out of jail but we can't buy freedom" (West 5). Kanye West sees the ultimate goal to be overcoming racial oppression, an idea that money cannot purchase.

In her interview with Anita Merina, Karima Amin explains, "Not all of America's history is hearts and flowers and we have to talk about the issues that a group like Public Enemy might bring up" (Merina 18). Karima Amin could mean using songs such as "Fight the Power" for their abstract ideals, or addressing more concrete problems within the African American community through songs like "911 Is a Joke." Amin's idea about using message rap is relevant to all periods in the hip-hop and spoken word past, present, and future. While the artists will change with generation, the idea of socially relevant texts will remain the same.

Finally, Merina's article discusses rap music's potential for literature classes. Teacher Sonja Burdix uses more common classroom poetry, yet she parallels it with the music of the hip-hop generation. According to the teacher, she has students read the works of poets like Langston Hughes, and then recite it to rap beats (Merina 18). In both exercises, the students actively participate; however, the latter presents the poetry so that the students can relate the lines to

the world in which they live. They develop an appreciation for the poetry because they enjoy reciting it to the music of more contemporary artists. Through rap, the teacher teaches his or her students the value of poetry. By building the parallel among rap music, spoken word, and poetry more often read in classes, the teacher can show students how to analyze hip-hop and spoken word in a similar manner. Because these two contemporary forms of poetry exhibit some of the characteristics common in the works of other poets (i.e. metaphor, rhythm, rhyme, etc.), they can be taught accordingly.

Furthermore, the use of rap in the classroom is explored in Dierdre Glenn Paul's "Rap and Orality: Critical Media Literacy, Pedagogy, and Cultural Synchronization". By using rap music in her own classroom, the author determines the benefits and consequences of such exposure. Teachers are able to bring the music into the classroom and, for example, unite a gap that exists between the teacher and student. The author argues that the percentage of students of color is increasing in public schools, while the percentage of European American teachers in public schools remains high (Paul 3). Because many of the students identify with hip-hop as a form of popular art, the teachers are able to establish a point of contact. Paul uses her own experiences of rap in a South Bronx classroom as an example. In her case, rap music was focused on a predominantly African American and Latino audience.

It is significant that many students view hip-hop music and spoken word performance as preferable forms of expression, because it is their connection with these art forms that leads teachers to realize these new avenues for reaching

students. Houston A. Baker's 1990s question to students, "What will be the poetry for the next society?" prompted answers of "rap" and "MTV", signs that even at that time students themselves saw hip-hop as a driving force, one with legitimacy as a form of poetry (Baker 94). Students would see texts such as Kanye West's "Never Let Me Down" as a representation of hip-hop as one of the newest forms of poetry. The song consists of verses from Jay-z and Kanye West, but it also features a spoken word performance by an artist named J. Ivy. West's lyrics alone exhibit characteristics of poetry such as rhyme, emotion, sound, and imagination. He writes:

[...]Now niggas can't make it to ballots to choose leadership
But we can make it to Jacob and to the dealership
[...] But in a land where niggas praise Yukon's and getting
paid/ It's gonna take a lot more than coupons to get us saved
[...] (West 6).

West explains the need to vote as compared to what he sees as popular in the African American community. He argues against materialism, saying African Americans have no problem getting to car dealerships or "Jacob", a popular jeweler in New York City. West continues by exposing the futility of embracing luxury items such as a "Yukon's" (West 6). He also uses a play on "coupons" to indicate a need for some sort of savior for African American materialists. For West, coupons represent an idea with which his listeners can identify. He, instead, advocates turning to political action as a necessary priority for African Americans.

With the significance of hip-hop and spoken word, a question arises about useful approaches in instituting these forms into an educational curriculum. If

teachers are to use these types of poetry as educational tools, Dierdre Glenn Paul explains that the educators must first develop their own understanding of the works. After convincing other teachers to use rap music in the classroom, Paul reports several of the teachers' responses:

[I]Experienced what it is like to be in a learning situation where I did not understand what was going on. I didn't understand a word of the rap music (loved the beat...).

The privilege and power of language...these are points I never thought of before. Poetry can be defined as personal stories of injustice. The artform that is chosen by the poet should not be the determining factor as to whether or not it is poetry (3).

Clearly, hip-hop and spoken word are used to educate both the students and the teachers. The teachers are educated with forms of poetry with which they may not be accustomed. The educators may not fully understand the texts, but with student interactions, the poetry will be interpreted according to various points of view. While hip-hop and hip-hop-related spoken word poetry may confront generational and cultural gaps, they also act as other forms of poetry do to bring about understanding regarding the poet's perspective.

One teacher's assertion that "the artform that is chosen by the poet should not be the determining factor as to whether or not it is poetry" supports the cases of hip hop and spoken word, because such a suggestion allows for the two to be considered as legitimate as traditionally used texts (Paul 3). As teachers encourage students to note the poetic aspects of Saul Williams' and Tupac Shakur's works, the students open their minds to a world of poetry surrounding them. They no longer have to look to distant times, cultures, or situations to identify poetry.

Paul's argument points out the importance of teachers' understanding this new poetry and being open to interpretations other than their own. The author is concerned that using new forms like rap could prove counterproductive if teachers only see hip-hop and spoken word for their negative aspects (Paul 4). In order to bridge the student-teacher gap, teachers will have to see hip-hop and spoken word from the students' point of view, or at least to some extent. In other words, they will have to understand the value that students place on the artists' works; for many of the students, the artists' songs and poetry represent their own lives and obstacles. For example, Kanye West's "We Don't Care" addresses the problems of education and the misplacement of African American students in special education classes:

You know the kids gonna act a fool
When you stop the programs for after school
[...]See now we smart
We ain't retards the way teachers thought
Hold up hold fast we make mo' cash
Now tell my momma I belong in that slow class
It's bad enough we on welfare
You trying to put me on the school bus with the space for the
wheelchair[...] (West 5).

West explains the need for after school programs and implies that teachers tend to place students in special education without understanding the students' real problems. Saying "...we make mo' cash..." West attempts to establish a link between material success and a student's real intelligence. According to his way of thinking, teachers are too hasty to place students in special education programs. He supports his claim of other real student problems by pointing out "...it's bad enough we on welfare..." (West 5). West highlights an injustice in the teachers' overlooking poverty as a source of student problems. He argues that upon closer

examination, teachers may realize that their students are capable of participating in regular classes. Through the use of such lyrics, students and teachers may establish points of connection. Both will be able to discuss poetry relevant to the students' everyday lives. An educator's respect for the art form he or she teaches will strengthen the students' connection with the teacher.

Meanwhile, one way of teaching hip-hop and spoken word is by presenting the texts in the same ways as the artists themselves. Both forms of poetry are noted for their connections with reality, an idea that lies in their social and political relevance. Hip-hop music and spoken word performance many times use metaphor and vernacular to critique power structures (Rose 100-101). In the classroom, it is inevitable that the socially and politically aimed texts will necessarily be discussed. The texts' relevance to social and political problems will provide a way of bringing current events into the classroom.

In introducing the new texts into classrooms, teachers should look at each artist's work for what it offers. In her study, Dierdre Glenn Paul presents rap videos to groups of teachers in order to determine the ways in which they would discuss the texts in a classroom atmosphere (Paul 5). For example, the study uses various songs and videos for each sample group. The author provides a way for teachers to first examine texts, creating their own understanding of the songs and (in the case of spoken word) poems. After determining useful works, the teachers can introduce the texts to the classrooms. Paul's teacher questionnaire concerning rap music and videos consists of the following:

What message is this rap/video conveying? Do you personally agree with the message? How could you resist/argue with the

message if you desired to do so? Is the use of rap/video in the classroom a pedagogically sound approach? Why or Why not? What potential problems are posed by the use of rap/video in the classroom? (6).

Such questions give the teacher an opportunity to see the text from several points of view. He realizes the impact of his own bias on the subject, which allows the teacher to separate his own views from the potential educational benefits or consequences.

Using such questions as a guide, the teacher is able to determine whether each individual text is appropriate for the classroom. The teacher can juxtapose his own view of what the text conveys with the ways in which a student might interpret the same text. In addition, by deciding whether he agrees with the artist's argument, the teacher will acknowledge his biases in presenting the information to the classroom. Ultimately, the educator will weigh the positive learning tools with any negative consequences, thereby determining the appropriateness of the song or poem.

Deirdre Glenn Paul's studies of rap in the classroom discuss specific cases in which the questionnaire was employed. For instance, one group of teachers uses rapper Jay-z's adaptation of the Broadway song "Hard Knock Life". The study explains that while some teachers immediately considered the song to be one of struggle, like the version in *Annie*, others saw the video and lyrics as typical of negative behavior in hip-hop culture. In the video, Jay-z has wealth, yet he is unable to remove his friends from poverty (Paul 5). Some teachers understood the song as Jay-z's expression of the struggle he endured, while others saw the song and video for its support of excessive materialism. In answering the

question. “What message is this rap/video conveying?”, some critics supported Jay-z’s portrayal of his success; others saw the video as a portrayal of a status not realistically attainable in such impoverished communities (Paul 5-6).

Employing such methods in the classroom would provide the opportunity for the students themselves to argue the merits and/or lacking characteristics of songs or poems. Paul’s questionnaire serves as a springboard for ideas, one that could prove useful for both students and teachers. Through such approaches, students will compare and contrast their experiences with the text to those of teachers, bridging the generational, cultural, and other gaps.

In his *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy*, Houston A. Baker advocates rap music as important to the academic world. By taking his analysis one step further, one can argue that both hip-hop and spoken word are significant for their potential contributions to education. Explaining the magnitude of rap as a movement, Baker says:

It is the “in effect” archive where postmodernism has been dopely sampled for the international nineties. It is the job of Black Studies to provide an adequate hearing (100).

Baker’s explanation is limited to rap music, but he presents an argument under which spoken word logically falls because of its discussion of poverty and other issues in the African American community. Also, he even sees the significance of the movement in the 1990s, suggesting that hip-hop and spoken word have had time to become stronger in their presence in African American studies.

Similar to other teachers, Baker employs the new text by comparing it to older works. In the classroom, he parallels Shakespeare’s *Henry V* to hip-hop

group Public Enemy. He explains both as powerful figures who are geniuses with their use of words. He then delves into an investigation of a need for political and social change. The class's discussion about a person's breaching a neighbor's fence confronts the question of the fence's real purpose. By likening *Henry V* to Public Enemy's politically conscious "Don't Believe the Hype" Baker enlightens his students as to the fence's benefiting the government and Henry V in the form of taxes, not necessarily the citizens. The government, like that of Public Enemy's era, is portrayed in both accounts as a power structure concerned primarily with its own interests. According to Baker, the fence benefits Henry V by allowing him to tax citizens for their individual properties (Baker 98).

Baker's discussion with the international London class shows the parallels between old and new texts. Both forms present some of the same ideas, however the latter present these ideas by the use of contemporary vernacular texts that aid students in their political understandings. Baker's discussion produces the argument that "Patriotism, a show of hands by the class revealed, is a 'hype' if it means dying for England" (Baker 99). Students associate Public Enemy's way of expressing cynicism toward the state with Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The students understand the text more easily with Public Enemy's lyrics as a complement, because they understand the more contemporary argument and use of vernacular.

After a discussion of various methods of presenting hip-hop and spoken word to the classroom, it is perhaps beneficial to explore certain accompanying arguments that the two forms of poetry inevitably will call to the forefront. Along

with other issues, the type of cultural influence and language used in both hip-hop and spoken word will be called into question.

In Kevin Powell's *Step Into A World*, Mark Anthony Neal explains these newest forms of postmodernism as products of the "post-Soul" generation:

In short, the "post-Soul" generation comes to maturity during and is thus marked by the incidents of black middle-class flight, a substantial deterioration in the quality of black public life, the unequivocal re-emergence of the conservative Right, and the failure of post-Civil Rights strategies to adequately respond to any of these life-affecting threats. (Powell 184).

With Neal's explanation, both hip-hop and spoken word fit into the author's post-Soul category. Neal attributes African American education in the post-Soul generation largely to the presence of pragmatic sources such as hip-hop and spoken word. These expressive arts provided a form discourse in the African American community during a time that Neal sees as bleak for African Americans.

Viewing hip-hop as an educational resource, especially because of its prominence in American society, Neal notes its presence as a form that plays the role of poetry with real life relevance. He writes:

Ironically it is hip-hop[...]that provides the metaphoric inspiration through which the "post-Soul" generation would generate its critical and intellectual perspectives. In its essence, hip-hop has aimed to stimulate a dialogue across the chasm of silence that has engulfed black communal discourse in the "post-Soul" era, by popularizing the dominant issues within contemporary black urban life (193).

According to Neal's point of view, hip-hop has merit in the classroom because it allows students to deal with the largely urban and largely African American problems on which the music focuses. Hip-hop, like spoken word, is important in

that it provides an expressive escape for students. Along with the new text's literary side, the music and poetry will be useful in the students' personal lives. They will be able to deal with issues such as poverty and politics through analysis of texts that involve them, or at least people like them.

Neal argues that intellectuals must connect with the problems within the black community, implying hip-hop as a basis for such communication. Intellectuals must be able to appreciate the view of the underprivileged that hip-hop many times represents. Neal says that much of the scholarship concerning African American studies has failed to discuss life from the perspective of the "post-Soul" generation, especially the period since the late 1980s (Powell 194). For Neal, hip-hop and spoken word, as new texts, involve many of the issues pertinent to this generation. If other sectors of the academic realm have overlooked this "post-Soul" generation, the new texts directly discuss society from this point of view.

In addition to the cultural aspect of hip-hop and spoken word texts, one must also take into account one of the controversial sides of these forms of poetry. Because of the use of black vernacular in these contemporary texts, the quality of the poetry has been called into question. In many cases, critics consider instituting hip-hop and spoken word into the classroom to be the equivalent of an argument for bringing predominantly African American vernacular into the classroom. A.J. Verdelle argues, "...The ebonics idea seems a faulty simplification, an approach that lacks analysis, a freeze frame of schools and teachers and children teetering on the precipice of total collapse and failure"

(Verdelle 6). Because of the connection between black vernacular and hip-hop and spoken word, critics on both sides have formed strong opinions concerning the texts.

The vernacular of hip-hop and spoken word rises as a challenge to what has been deemed proper English. With the debate over the Oakland School Board's decision to use "ebonics", these two expressive forms have become even more important. The emergence of both hip-hop and spoken word into mainstream society has brought about two main arguments. The first is that the use of African American vernacular in the classroom, even in the form of poetry such as hip-hop and spoken word, is a miseducation of students. The argument follows the idea that students are not learning a legitimate language; instead, they are learning to corrupt the proper English language. On the other hand, however, some critics argue that African American vernacular provides a better form of expression, one that should be valued for its cultural significance. According to this argument, black vernacular should be seen as a part of African American identity not to be overlooked.

First, African American vernacular is known by many terms: black vernacular, ebonics, blackspeak, black English, and various others all concern vernacular spoken by African Americans (Verdelle 5, Powell 152-159). In her argument against the use of the vernacular used in some forms of contemporary African American expression, A.J. Verdelle explains that the movement is an obstacle to education. While school systems such as some California school districts advocated the use of ebonics in order to teach students "standard"

English. Verdelle says it is counterproductive, especially for African American progress:

The pedagogical strategy advanced by ebonics adds unnecessary steps to our children's already complicated path toward learning, a path obstructed in most cases by the widespread belief and unrelenting message that African-Americans lack intelligence—a position that ebonics seems, unwittingly, to support (5).

Verdelle clearly feels that approaches that include bringing more ebonics into the classroom will ultimately have negative effects on the students. Verdelle, like some other critics, is concerned with the idea that many people associate the use of ebonics with an inferior level of intelligence. Because ebonics reflects black culture, the author is concerned that promoting this vernacular will reinforce negative stereotypes of African American intelligence.

Verdelle feels that those who support ebonics in the classroom are unaware of the consequences, and do so blindly. In addition to denouncing ebonics, the author makes a connection between this form of vernacular and rap music. Saying that rap music is "...an excellent and parallel example of a conferred legitimacy run wild," Verdelle suggests that society's legitimizing black vernacular and hip-hop will ultimately prove tragic. Although schools have good intentions in allowing hip-hop and spoken word (and therefore, ebonics) into the classroom, the author sees these as detrimental to African American progress and the education of students (Verdelle 6). However, one could argue that black vernacular does not necessarily take away from education. Perhaps it provides a more wide-ranging education.

Erin Aubry presents her own argument regarding the use of contemporary forms of African American expression in the classroom. In her article, "The Soul of Black Talk", Aubry underscores the significance of black vernacular in retaining a cultural identity. The author discusses growing up among speakers of various black vernaculars. She feels that obtaining knowledge of these vernaculars along with what has been deemed proper English allowed her to succeed in all sectors (Powell 152-153).

With the debate over ebonics, Erin Aubry focuses on the consequences of not allowing the use of black vernacular in the classroom:

Again uncertain of ourselves, we are forced to publicly denounce blackspeak as bad, to laugh at it, to put it away with childish things. Language may no longer be our cultural property, but another one of our social impediments, like drugs and gangs (153).

To Aubry, denouncing black vernacular reflects insecurity about black culture. She proposes the use of black vernacular in order to enhance interaction with one's culture, an idea in clear opposition to Verdelle's argument. Aubry points to drugs and gangs as negative influences within the African American community (Powell 153). By failing to acknowledge the importance and legitimacy of black vernacular, the author argues, critics are categorizing it along with the reality of negative influences in the African American community.

In using hip-hop and spoken word in the classroom, teachers will have to decide the validity of Verdelle's and Aubry's arguments. If they agree with Aubry's point of enhancing black culture through use of black vernacular, the texts will clearly aid students. If, however, the educational community decides to denounce black vernacular as miseducation, the question of how to incorporate

the positive aspects without negative consequences will loom larger. It is important to note that in introducing hip-hop and spoken word to the classroom, the educational system will not necessarily have to adopt the policy of teaching ebonics. By teaching the message of the new texts (hip-hop and spoken word) through ebonics, teachers will not necessarily focus on how to “correctly” speak ebonics. Black vernacular, instead, will aid in the identification of text themes. In addition, the use of black vernacular will not work against the need to teach some standard form of English in classes.

Aubry, a proponent of ebonics, admits that she does not see ebonics as a legitimate language. However, she does stress the importance of one’s being able to identify himself through his own form of expression. Borrowing from James Baldwin, she says “...we have been consigned to letting others describe to us who we are” (Powell 153). Aubry, instead argues for the opposite, a way of African Americans’ reinforcing their cultural identity through vernacular.

Aside from the arguments for and against black vernacular-infiltrated lyrics, texts from earlier periods arise as important tools in advocating the institution of hip-hop and spoken word into schools. If, for example, these earlier texts that are now highly regarded for their literary impacts are paralleled with contemporary texts, one sees the true value of the latter.

It may be difficult for some critics to imagine today’s rap music as poetry, but when placed in the context of African American expression of struggle, one can see how the texts relate to texts of past generations. Scholars have praised the blues culture and black vernacular evident in works such as Zora Neale Hurston’s

Their Eyes Were Watching God, yet today's black vernacular seems to have many critics. Erin Aubry makes the following observation:

[...]if blues, and a whole canon of classic black literature, ain't nothing but poetically wrought ebonics, how ironic—and hypocritical—that black English has become such a pejorative in the “real” world (Powell 154).

Such a suggestion is applicable to hip-hop and spoken word. Because hip-hop and spoken word many times exhibit characteristics of black vernacular and they have their own music culture (rap), it seems that they should be accepted for similar reasons.

In the case of hip-hop and spoken word, there are questions as to the quality of the texts. Because of the cultural impacts and language used in both forms of poetry, critics argue the benefits and consequences of hip-hop and spoken word in the classroom. It seems that students will benefit from exposure to what they consider to be their own forms of expression. They will develop an understanding of popular lyrics and texts in the context of a literary society, assuring them that there is more to the works of artists like Tupac Shakur and Saul Williams than one might think.

After seeing the educational side of artists' works with which they already identify, students will develop more interest in education. While the debate will continue concerning the violence, misogyny, and language used in hip-hop and spoken word, it is important that critics realize the positive aspects of using these lyrics as texts. As these two newest forms of texts emerge as prominent forces in

American and world culture, it seems impossible to deny their presence in virtually all sectors.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, Jr., Houston A. *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Carroll, Kenneth. "Tupac's Squandered Gift." *Washington Post* (September 22, 1996): C1, C5.
- Conyers, Jr., James L. *African American Jazz and Rap: Social and Philosophical Examinations of Black Expressive Behavior*. North Carolina: McFarland, 2001.
- Dyson, Michael E. *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*. Basic Civitas Books, 2001.
- Eleveld, Mark. *The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop, and the Poetry of a New Generation*. Sourcebooks Trade, 2003.
- Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary*. New York: Lippincott and Crowell, Publishers, 1980.
- Gilmore, Mikal. "Easy Target: Why Tupac Should Be Heard Before He's Buried." *Rolling Stone* 746. (October 31, 1996): 41-49, 81.
- Jackson II, Ronald L. and Elaine B. Richardson. *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations*. New York: Taylor and Francis Books, 2003.

- Kitwana, Bakari. *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis of African American Culture*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002.
- Merina, Anita. "Rap: Tool or Trouble." *NEA Today*. April 1993: 18.
- McWhorter, John H. "Up From Hip-Hop." *Commentary*. 115.3 (2003): 62-65.
- Paul, Dierdre Glenn. "Rap and Orality: Critical Media Literacy, Pedagogy, and Cultural Synchronization." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. 44.3 (2000): 246-253.
- Powell, Kevin. *Step Into A World: A Global Anthology of a New Black Literature*. New York: Wiley, 2000.
- Redmond, Eugene B. *Drumvoices: The Mission of Afro-American Poetry*. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1976.
- Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.
- Shakur, Tupac A. *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*. Simon & Schuster, 1999.
- Thomas, Lorenzo. *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2000.
- Verdelle, A.J. "Classroom Rap." *Nation*. 264. 3 (1997): 5-6.
- West, Kanye. *The College Dropout*. New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, LLC, 2004.
- Williams, Saul. *...said the Shotgun to the Head*. MTV Books, 2003.

<http://www.annonline.com/interviews/990715/biography.html>

<http://www.defpoetryjam.com>

http://hiphopcongress.com/expression/poetry/poetry_archive_saulwilliams.html

<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=poetry>

<http://www.slamnation.com/archive/Links/Saul/TimeOutInterview/159SAULW>

HTM