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THE RHETORIC OF THE HIP HOP HUSTLER: SHIFTING REPRESENTATIONS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

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Approved by:

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Advisor   Date

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DEDICATION

For my mother, E. Denise Naumoff Byard.

of the minds in theory land. Neil Butt is someone that should appear in the acknowledgment page of anyone he meets. He is one of the most selfless people I know and many would not have made it through our program without his help and kindness. Finally, I thank Dale Anderson for sharing his expansive knowledge of hip hop with me.

I would like to end by thanking every professor I have had in the years I have spent in college. I would like to give a special thanks to Dr. William Trapani. His classes truly inform how I see the field and the world. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Stephen Depoe. He did more than serve as my M.A. thesis advisor. He supported me and helped me to see where I should be.

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Introduction

The twenty-first century is marked by uncertainty. On a global scale individuals are confronted by a myriad of exigencies – economic, environmental, technological, religious, and ethical – that leave us searching for a way to understand the present and anticipate the future. We are confronted with questions about the very existence and continuation of the human species as environmental degradation persists, alternative energy sources escape us, and the human population blooms to an unsustainable number. Technology is changing our world at a pace that is dizzying. Political and economic power shifts reverberate in unprecedented ways because of the interconnected nature of countries due to globalization. The world is also faced with the fear of infectious and fatal diseases spreading across borders, oceans, and continents because of the exchange of goods and travel demands of multinational industries.

The United States, specifically, is confronted by a great deal of uncertainty. Factors such as the 9-11 attacks, war, accusations and proof of torture, the failing economy, the appointment of our first black president, the uprising of the Tea Party, mass shootings, continued terrorist threats or attacks, and the persistence of multiculturalism all coalesce, leaving Americans anxious about the U.S. and its future. This uncertainty produces competing and contradictory rhetorical texts that seek to speak for or represent the country. Debates such as that over healthcare reform, the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell" in the military, new voter registration requirements, the institutionalization of marriage equality, and immigration policies have revealed tensions over who can and who should get to count in America. The looming dominance of China and our debt to them greatly compromises our notions of economic security

and hegemony while simultaneously undermining the capitalist structure and the concept of American exceptionalism. The middle-class is disappearing as our nation struggles to determine and form the structure and make-up of the twenty-first century job market. Examples such as these reveal that Americans are simultaneously managing and negotiating the comfort and limitations of clinging to a mythologized past as well as the possibility and fear that change presents. What voices get heard, what sensibilities prevail, and what face(s) represent the nation will determine what it means to be American in the 21st century.

Benedict Anderson accounted for how individuals come to see themselves as belonging to a nation in *Imagined Communities.* Individuals will never become acquainted with all of their fellow countrymen but they must believe that they know them and in this imagined knowing a sense of communion is formed. This notion of community is felt because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7). This sense of "fraternity" moves individuals to kill and die for such "imaginings" (Anderson 7). Anderson notes that shifts that began in Western Europe led to people looking for ways to establish this sense of fraternity and also identify new centers of power. The fall of divinely ordained monarchs, new social and scientific discoveries, and economic changes left people searching for a way to hold their societies together (Anderson 36). One key unifier in the face of such changes was language. The popularization of print and the spread of printed documents that capitalism fostered led individuals to identify with others because they spoke and *read* the same language (Anderson 82). Language became one of the key unifiers: "Through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed" (Anderson 154). A shared language is becoming an increasingly contentious issue in the United States. Various

areas in America now no longer require that an immigrant learn English to function in society. This is most clearly evidenced by debates over whether or not Spanish should be declared the second language of the United States. Many businesses and medical centers provide individuals the option of communicating in English or Spanish. This potential bilingual America is embraced by some and seen as the ruination of the nation by others.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg asserts "few nation-states or national identities are as artificially constructed" as the United States and that "few have been more successful in imbuing generation after generation of immigrants with a deep sense of national belonging" (1). Such imaginings, as described by Benedict Anderson and Smith-Rosenberg, become increasingly difficult to maintain in a diverse populace. Samuel P. Huntington states that America is "less a nation than it [has] been for a century" due to "globalization, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, immigration, subnationalism, and antinationalism" resulting in a "battered American consciousness" (4-5). Huntington fears Americans may indeed face a similar fate as Sparta or Rome: "Historically the substance of American identity has involved four key components: race, ethnicity, culture (most notably language and religion) and ideology. The racial and ethnic Americas are no more. Cultural America is under siege" (12). Many of these intersecting factors are illustrated and informed by the influx of immigrants to the United States. Dina Gavrilos notes that the "unprecedented levels of immigration from Mexico, as well as other Latin American and Asian countries over the past three decades" has resulted in a public discourse that points to a decline in a sense of a unified national identity (95).

While immigration is nothing new to the United States, the contemporary influx of immigrants presents challenges to national identity that differ from those of previous eras. While immigrants have always informed American culture there was always a presumed desire to

assimilate to the white mainstream. However, the rise of identity politics in the 1960s and 1970s created a climate of multiculturalism and the embracing of subnationalisms. Since then, immigrants are no longer as apt to want or need to assimilate to "American" culture but rather force changes in the status quo. This shift even appears in popular culture; for instance, upon examining television series that feature prominent Latino actors, Guillermo Avila-Saavedra found a tension between assimilation and maintenance of their own ethnic identity (271). Rather than seeking to sanitize their otherness and make themselves American, i.e. white, well-known actors such as George Lopez, Carlos Mencia, and Freddie Prinze, Jr. force viewers to acknowledge their cultural difference.

Americans are also no longer fitting into tidy identity categories. One way of managing difference was for a society to be able to clearly define the substance of those differences. Again, as we persist in an increasingly multicultural society we must also acknowledge that our categories of identification are becoming increasingly messy and ill-suited to define the individuals contained within the populace. Social scientists Davis, Alexander, Calvi and others reveal the heterogeneity of Black America. The "Black Identity Classification Scale" they developed contained 16 ethnic identity types. This scale demonstrates the uncertainty that surrounds the categories "Black" and "African-American" and also speaks to the prevalence of subnationalism within the populace.

Naturally, these developments produce a sense of discomfort among the large segments of Americans that still identifies with more traditional Anglo conceptions of national identity. The political and cultural divisiveness evidenced by the formation of the Tea Party illustrates a resistance, if not a direct rejection, of a diversified American populace and culture. Even as public discourse celebrating post-racialism circulates, Frederick Lewis astutely notes that "the

reactive identity of 'real Americans' taking back their country from what they seem to perceive as a federal government dominated by urban 'elitists' and racial minorities is palpable" (193). In sum, it is becoming increasingly difficult to agree on what constitutes and structures American identity.

The Self-Made Man

One way to explore the contested and confused nature of national identity is to look to one of its most foundational constructs, the Self-Made Man. Sociologist and Masculine Studies scholar Michael Kimmel states that we can trace one of the first Self-Made Man narratives back to a play entitled *The Contrast* (*Manhood in America*). It was the first professionally produced play in American history and opened in New York City on April 16, 1787. The five-act comedy, written by Royall Tyler, is centered on two men competing for the affection of the same woman. Kimmel describes *The Contrast* as a "patriotic play" that "offered a kind of Declaration of Independence of Manners and Morals a decade after the original Declaration spelled out political and economic rights and responsibilities" (*Manhood in America* 13). *The Contrast* is important because it is one of the first of many popular culture texts that sought to answer a set of questions: "What kind of men would populate this new nation? What vision of manhood would be promoted? What would it mean to be a man in the newly independent United States?" (Kimmel, *Manhood in America* 14). The character of Mr. Van Rough answers these questions. As the Self-Made Man his identity is directly linked to his activities in the public sphere and his self-made social status. Social mobility was an appealing notion at the time as many immigrants were fleeing European countries, particularly England, where one's class status was often limited by hereditary titles (Kimmel, *Manhood in America* 17). The Self-Made Man represented and embodied the American ideals of hard work, courage, equality, freedom, liberty, and autonomy,

or in other words, he becomes the ideal citizen-subject in the popular imagination of Americans. Kimmel asserts that American manhood's "most important characteristics owe their existence to the timing of the Revolution – the emergence of the Self-Made Men at that time and their great success in the new American democracy have a lot to do with what it is that defines a 'real' man even today" (*Manhood in America* 17). This popular figure plays a large part in how American identity becomes constructed as white and male.

The Self-Made Man was quite different from historical understandings of masculinity at the time. This new man in the New World was not a foppish aristocrat, a farmer, or an artisan. He forged his path in the public sphere by engaging in politics and industry. This is important to understand how the American citizen-subject becomes identified as primarily, if not only, white and masculine. White men were the ones engaged in the public sphere and permitted to engage in activities synonymous with citizenship and rights. This accounts for why even today the public sphere is still largely a white, masculine space and often if one is to engage in and be recognized within the public sphere one must do so in a way that adheres to norms and codes of intelligibility that are consistent with normative white masculinity (Squires 462).

This legacy, at least in part, accounts for the contemporary unequal distribution of rights in the United States and also explains the logic behind the privileging of the ideal citizen-subject as white, male, Christian, upper-class, and heterosexual. The topos of the Self-Made Man does not necessarily dictate that these qualities constitute the ideal citizen subject, but representations of this figure have proved very compelling as a way to center and privilege the qualities constituting American identity and citizenship. These qualities were rationalized as superior and central to national identity. One very important effect of such a conceptualization is theorized by Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman as the notion of "thick" versus "thin" rights. Simply put,

"thin" rights are what all American citizens possess simply by being American. But the extent to which these rights can be exercised is when they can be considered "thick." Understandably, those individuals who most closely embody the qualities of the white masculine subject most often have the thickest rights. The recognition of a discrepancy between "thick" and "thin" rights is the very stuff of claims to discrimination and the need to amend laws within the United States. When attention is brought to the lack of "thick" rights the white masculine subject as the prototypical American subject is by extension openly contested because it is made apparent that this figure, and its current instantiations, is not the sole embodiment of American identity.

The bootstrap myth and the American dream are discourses that accompany the narrative of the Self-Made Man. The bootstrap myth is referred to as a myth because it purports to describe a reality that does not necessarily exist. It is part of the American mythos that the country provides an "equal playing field" where people have equal access to resources, opportunities, and rights. This is a necessary condition to achieving your dreams. The American Dream then is the notion that anyone in the United States can "pull themselves up by their bootstrap," which is a euphemism for hard work, and as a result they can achieve their dream. Simply put, if you live in the United States, work hard, and play by the rules you will be economically comfortable. It is imagined that the pursuit of the American Dream is the ultimate testament to the presence of equality among the nation's citizens. Through economic progress and mobility an individual is able to dramatically change the circumstances of their life. The conclusion we are to reach then from these narratives is that Americans are equal. Individuals may have different skills, abilities, and inclinations but Americans are equal in that the system(s) is structured in such a way as to ensure equality among the citizenry in regards to rights and access to opportunities.

In the U.S., economic and class status are perhaps the most easily transformed identity markers; however, even when those markers are changed other factors such as race, gender, or sexuality may continue to hinder one from fully employing thick rights. Impediments to full citizenship based on such characteristics are increasingly being brought into public discourse and contested, rather than accepted and endured. Given this changed climate, this project seeks to explore how representations of national identity are being constructed and negotiated, particularly in regards to how this representation relies on and is intertwined with the bootstrap narrative. As Americans come to question and challenge the appropriateness and legitimacy of this type of construction new sensibilities are desired and popularized.

Traditionally, to investigate matters of citizenship and national identity one would look to political discourse. It is not, however, only overtly political texts that inform our notions of national identity. Increasingly, popular culture has come to be the vehicle through which we negotiate who we are as a nation, as well as many other cultural and political topics, and as such these texts provide a great insight into the tensions described above.

In this dissertation I propose that although it may seem an unlikely candidate, hip hop and its leading voices feature some of the most serious and significant rearticulations of American identity. I say "seemingly unlikely" because the black urban male is the imagined opposite of the assumed ideal subject of the white masculine citizen subject along almost every dimension. He differs from this conventional understanding of national identity in regards to race and class but also culture and ideology. Hip hop is primarily viewed as black male culture and historically black men have not been cast in favorable terms. In this project I examine how black masculinity is reworked by the hip hop culture to feature a figure that is heroic and a voice for Americans. This figure is a complicated one and an examination of such a persona is a highly

complex endeavor. While I will be focusing on the resistant and positive rhetorical potential of the Hustler, it should be noted that there are possible negative rhetorical outcomes. For example, the Hustler, much like the traditional Self-Made Man, is extremely individualistic and self-motivated. This can be problematic to fostering a sense of collective action in the American urban core. Secondly, the Hustler may intentionally or unintentionally promote a lifestyle that encourages men to engage in criminal activity and violence.

In what follows I will argue that we are witnessing the appearance of a new version of the Self-Made Man and by extension the accompanying discourses of the American dream and the bootstrap myth. The hero of this reconfiguration is what I have termed the hip hop Hustler. His narrative is in direct opposition to the traditional bootstrap myth in that he challenges the notion of a "level playing field" by shedding light on the challenges faced when living in a racist system rigged with hurdles that make the "field" anything but even. He works hard but his success is not made possible by following conventional rules; rather, he must circumvent the system and break the law to survive initially and then to become wealthy. The necessity to engage in rule-breaking is constitutive of the Hustler ethos. He does not sanitize his story or cover up his illegal doings to the larger public but rather often makes them the focal point of his public persona. In fact many hip hop hustlers continue to shift along a continuum of legal and illegal activities once they have gained legitimate wealth and success. This fluidity between occupying spaces of wealth and poverty, between legal and illegal activity, is what maintains a Hustler's authenticity with both urban and suburban America (and all the spaces in between).

As stated above, one of the primary ways that America understands itself and feels a sense of trust in the systems that govern it is via the bootstrap myth narrative. What makes the figure of the Hustler so challenging to conventional understandings of national identity is that he

does not follow proper channels and by extension demonstrates a loss of faith in the system. While he is a hard worker he must use his savvy and inventiveness to break laws and circumvent a system rigged against him succeeding. Yet the Hustler can claim an American identity despite norms and ideologies that seek to exclude him. Thus, my second line of argument is that with the hip hop Hustler we are witnessing a claim to fuller citizenship that rests significantly on a changed "rags to riches" narrative; a narrative that is based on a critique of the system as a basis for personal success and access to a life of liberty and equality.

Text

To better understand how the hip hop Hustler resignifies a claim to American identity I perform a thematic analysis of *Decoded*, the autobiography of rap artist and hip hop mogul Shawn Carter, better known as Jay-Z. He is the exemplar Hustler. Jay-Z began his rise to fame in the mid-1990s. Jay-Z can be said to follow in the tradition of other black musicians in the genres of jazz, rock and roll, and rhythm and blues. These artists differ from Hustlers because Hustlers build empires that reach beyond the music industry. He parlayed a successful rap career into an empire by using his music as a way to promote the brands he invested in and created. Some of his key financial achievements include his record label Roc-A-Fella records, clothing line Roca Wear, sports agency Roc Nation Sports, sharing in the ownership of and bringing the NBA basketball team the Nets to Brooklyn, as well as numerous other ventures. It should be noted that Jay-Z, and other Hustlers, are not the first entrepreneurial success stories to come from poor, black neighborhoods. They are, however, unique in their ability to resist assimilation. Jay-Z also is a strong cultural force. In 2008 he was sought out by Barack Obama and his campaign team for advice on how to best capture and connect with American youth. There are arguably only a few other individuals that have the power to shape and shift culture in the way Jay-Z does.

Jay-Z has "leveraged" his brand to the extent that one can live a Jay-Z life; you could, for example, wake up to Jay-Z on the radio, use his 91X cologne, put on his Rocawear clothes and Reebok S. Carter sneakers, go to a Nets game, dine at the Spotted Pig, then head to *Fela,* the Broadway musical he helped fund, and end your night at his 40/40 Club (Greenburg 3-4).

No other hip hop Hustler presents such a rich rhetorical text as does Jay-Z in his autobiography, *Decoded.* The genre of autobiography can be an important rhetorical element to consider as a critic. Autobiographies are rhetorical because in telling one's own story the writer often wishes to be viewed in a certain way by their readers. Autobiographies also present the author's view of the world and as such are a rich source for discerning the views and beliefs of the writer. *Decoded* was published in late 2010 when Jay-Z was firmly established as a hip hop icon. In it he narrates his journey from a young drug-dealer to an internationally recognized artist and businessman. As he explains all of the rhetorical moves of his verse the readers also gain insight into the necessary moves and the years of work that have gone into the construction of his persona, of his move from Shawn Carter to Jay-Z. Ultimately the text is written in a way that feels authentically Jay-Z, in the sense that it is consistent with his persona as he presents it elsewhere. There is no attempt to formalize his speech as his writing alternates between a conversational form of standard American English and African American Vernacular English. In this way his writing of this autobiography features a type of rule breaking, a type of rule breaking that is part of the Hustler and hip hop ethos. In many ways this memoir is a typical bootstrap story but is also very different in important ways.

Throughout the text Jay-Z proclaims that only in America could this be his story and asserts that he indeed truly embodies the American spirit of independence and hard work. At the

same time his story is one of hustling that requires that he break rules of the law, social decorum, and the bootstrap myth's tenets of honest work.

Method

To understand the way in which Jay-Z, the exemplar Hustler, constructs his persona, how this construction reconfigures our understanding of the "bootstrap" myth, and how he, the successful hustler, claims American identity in light of this reconfiguration, I will perform a thematic analysis of *Decoded*. In doing so I am seeking to understand how all the elements of the text – the written word, pictures, typography, footnotes, structure, form – work together to describe and demonstrate the constituting elements and logics of the hip hop hustler. While performing this reading I will pay special attention to the ways in which Jay-Z draws our attention to and manages the tension of simultaneously creating and embodying a new mode of American identity that is in many ways contradictory to conventional understandings of this subject position.

Textual analysis is a valuable method for illuminating the persuasive strategies employed within a text. However, traditional rhetorical criticism reaches its limit when considering the emergence of this and other hip hop Hustler texts, that is, texts whose appearance is surprising and unanticipated. This is because traditional rhetorical theory concerns itself with the probable, with what usually happens, not with the improbable or what is highly unlikely. A well-known example of the privileging of the probable is Lloyd Bitzer's very influential theory of "The Rhetorical Situation." As Bitzer describes it, a rhetorical text arises in response to what he calls an exigence, or "an imperfection marked by urgency." The result is a more or less predictable discourse. In Bitzer's theorization the main purpose of rhetoric is to restore certainty where uncertainty exists, therefore, the rhetorical action of the audience will be one whose parameters

are predictable because there is historical evidence that indicates the rhetor's message will provoke a more or less expected outcome. Consider the reports of abuse of Syrian citizens by the Syrian regime. This violation of human rights is an exigence. The rhetorical response is President Obama's proposal of a targeted military strike against Syria, to send a message that the U.S. and the world does not condone or allow this treatment of people. This is a highly probable response because historically America has intervened in the maltreatment of others because of our democratic values, assumed moral superiority, and military might.

However, the emergence of the hip hop Hustler's text (that is, his persona and his performance of it, as demonstrated in *Decoded)* cannot be accounted for by traditional rhetorical theories because it is not in the realm of the probable and expected; his story does not conform to the expected outlines of the bootstrap myth and the various narratives that demonstrate and support it. Rhetorical theories that emphasize the probable also cannot account for the ways in which these texts have come to inform understandings of national identity, that is, their effects, because when following the rule of the probable one is only left with options that are sanctioned and pulled from convention and *doxa* (common sense, shared values and beliefs). In other words, you cannot look to theories that rely on doxastic knowledge to account for the appearance of hip hop texts. Similarly, hip hop rhetors do not adhere to conventional rules and therefore these rules cannot be applied to accurately account for the rhetorical force of their texts. This leaves me in need of an approach that allows me to account for the improbable.

Given that I need a complement to traditional methods of textual analysis I turn to Lawrence Grossberg. The emergence of the Hustler and, to use Grossberg's language, the "uptake" of the sensibility that accompanies the hip hop Hustler's persona and performances require that we look outside traditional renderings of rhetoric that are premised on an analysis of

the probable. To acquire such a supplement, a supplement that addresses the improbable, I look to the theorizations of context and "uptake" that Grossberg provides, which speaks to the unpredictable nature of contemporary texts. One can use Grossberg's theory to demonstrate that rhetoric is the result of a conjuncture of various overlapping contexts; contexts for Grossberg are the events and phenomena that create the conditions of possibility for a rhetorical response to be needed and for such an utterance to be possible. Each rhetoric occurs within various domains that comprise the social totality. Domains can be characterized as the bodies of discourse that are used to delineate and structure the different identifiable sections of a totality. Examples of domains would be politics, culture, economic, or the military. Within these domains, because they each contain their own constituting logic, the unpredictable is possible. Each domain is part of the social totality and therefore is to a certain extent subject to the overarching rules or conventions of the totality.   These domains are, however, simultaneously connected and disconnected from the totality because of the unique nature of each domain's constituting logic. There is a space, according to Grossberg, within each domain that allows for the emergence and operation of the unpredictable because a portion of the domain is subject to the rules of its constituting logic not necessarily the rules of the larger totality. Grossberg refers to this as embedded disembeddedness. An example of this would be the rhetoric of Thomas Beatie, who came to be known as the pregnant man. Thomas Beatie had the legal designation of male and the reproductive organs of a woman. Within the domain of the legal, where the constituting logic could be said to be authority, Beatie used his legal designation as male to authorize his claim to being a man while carrying a child.

Envisioning contexts as overlapping and informing one another in unique and unpredictable ways enables a theory to account for improbable as well as probable formations.

Grossberg's notion of "uptake" particularly illustrates the ways his theory accounts for the improbable. Uptake is the notion that a discourse can emerge within a particular context for a particular audience but the sensibility and practices produced by a text can travel and inform other contexts and audiences that are unintended and at times unimaginable. One such example is the emergence of the women known as "Twimoms." These are women that range from their mid-thirties to early fifties, they are often married with children, and are ardent fans of the young adult fiction series *Twilight*. These books are intended primarily for teenage girls but the uptake of this fandom sensibility gave this unintended audience a sense of community and of belonging to a culture all their own. The space of this culture allows women to behave in ways deemed immature or unacceptable within the larger social totality.

The United States faces a great deal of uncertainty over the future of the nation. Challenges to the hegemony of white masculinity as the embodiment of American identity from various groups of Americans create a moment for the unimaginable figures to inform and represent the American citizen. The hip hop Hustler is the result of this moment.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two: "Method: Approaching a Mode of Criticism to Account for Improbable Rhetorics"

I begin by detailing the tendency of rhetorical theorists to privilege constructions and understandings of rhetoric as emphasizing the probable. I discuss why this is limiting for rhetorical criticism in that certain texts require the acknowledgment of their unpredictable nature to be accurately understood. I then introduce the work of Lawrence Grossberg, especially those aspects of his thinking that provides a theory of discourse that accounts for the appearance of the improbable or unimaginable. I pay special attention to the concepts of conjuncture and

articulation since they are so useful in understanding the conditions that give rise to a text and its effects thereafter.

Chapter Three: "Understanding the Problem-Space of Contested American Identity and the Conjuncture of the Hip Hop Formation."

When employing Grossberg to account for improbable rhetorics there are two major initial tasks for the critic: the identification of the problem-space and the exploration of the conjuncture from which a rhetorical text emerges. In this chapter the problem-space of contested American identity is identified and then explained as resulting from a loss of faith in traditional renderings of the Self-Made Man. Next, I detail the various contexts that comprise the conjuncture of the hip hop formation and its primary rhetorical representation, the Hustler.

Chapter Four: "The Hustler's Use of the Logic of Commensuration and the Emergence of the Improbable Rhetoric of Jay-Z's Decoded."

In this chapter I employ Lawrence Grossberg's theory of embedded/disembedded domains to explain the improbable rhetorical figure I call the hip hop Hustler. I argue it is what Grossberg labels the "logic of commensuration," that is, the constituting logic of the economic domain, that allows for the emergence and rhetorical functioning of the Hustler. I conclude the chapter by examining, via thematic analysis, an improbable rhetoric of the exemplar Hustler, Jay-Z. This analysis serves as a case study and exemplifies the rhetorical strategies of the Hustler that are possible because of the unique nature of the conjuncture.

Chapter Five: "Understanding the Uptake and Outcomes of the 'Hustler' Sensibility"

To understand the function and relevance of the Hustler as a new mode of black masculinity I explore historical constructions of black masculinity, particularly those constructions produced and circulated via popular culture. This exploration demonstrates how

the Hustler becomes a figure that is challenging because he does not follow the traditional model of assimilation. I argue that for the "hustler," conventional notions of masculinity, figured as conventionally white, do not result in economic success and intelligibility; rather, the Hustler establishes a new mode of black masculinity. I then demonstrate, by looking at various texts from film, television, and popular culture, how the logic of this new figure is infused into the nation's sensibility and by extension affects understandings of American identity. I argue that a new sensibility has emerged, an ethos that recognizes that the tenets that structure and guide how one is to operate and succeed in America are not what we would like to believe them to be. The influence of the Hustler logic can largely be understood within what Grossberg labels as the domain of culture and its constituting logic of mediation.

Chapter Six: *"Reflections on Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research Questions"*

I conclude by discussing the contributions of my work to our understanding of how national identity is constructed and contested. The second major contribution of the dissertation is that it illustrates the rhetorical critics' need to consider theorizations of rhetoric that account for and embrace the improbable. This conception of rhetoric has to be part of the critic's "tool kit," so to speak, in that it has to be recognized as a legitimate and necessary way to read and account for a rhetorical text. I argue that the Hustler clearly demonstrates that the rhetor cannot predict or control rhetorical effect/affect. Next, I address the limitations of the project. Finally, I will close the dissertation by discussing the implications this study has for future research and the questions it has raised that I, or others, should take up.

Chapter 2 "Method: Approaching a Mode of Criticism to Account for Improbable Rhetorics"

Introduction

As I detailed earlier, the United States is facing multiple political, cultural, and social shifts. The nation is struggling to redefine itself and as a result its *doxa,* its commonsensical beliefs, becomes contested and no longer shared on a large scale. In times such as these the unpredictable occurs because we no longer can harness, or in some cases desire, the predictable. The available means of persuasion based on probability or likelihood are not always possible or appropriate when uncertainty flourishes. For this reason I argue that we need a complement to probable theories of rhetoric, a complement that considers the role that uncertainty and the improbable can play in rhetorical invention.

Moving Towards a Theory that Accounts for Improbable Rhetorical Outcomes

In his essay "Contingency and Probability" Dilip Gaonkar provides a useful way to conceive of rhetoric as encompassing that which can be highly unpredictable. He characterizes the function of rhetoric as operating on a continuum of possible options in specific speaking situations, situations that can range from the highly predictable to the extremely unlikely or unimaginable. When I say "unimaginable" I am referring to those things that rules of intelligibility would not normally permit. What seems unimaginable can also vary from one ideological framework to another. Some individuals may find it unimaginable to permit a "third sex" category on the census. However, those individuals that have an ambiguous or mixed sex biologically or psychologically and identify as possessing a mixed sex are not only able to imagine it but can make the claim that it is a necessity. This then forces certain individuals to confront the unimaginable. I am most interested in rhetorical texts that are highly unlikely if not

radically incalculable. This approach allows for a more expansive view of rhetoric and extends the conventional understandings of rhetoric as that which privileges and often depends most on the predictable and what is easily controlled.

To understand how our theories of rhetoric came to concern themselves so heavily with probable outcomes we must return to Aristotle. When pressed by Plato to provide a "domicile" for rhetoric, Aristotle stated that rhetoric's home is the realm of the contingent (not the necessary). Simply the contingent is that which is "marked by human actions because in any given situation, human beings can conceivably act in other ways than they do" (Gaonkar, "Contingency and Probability" 153). The contingent nature of rhetoric does not produce random occurrences but rather outcomes that are possible and also probable. While there may be numerous possibilities in a given rhetorical situation the possible outcomes are nevertheless neither limitless nor random occurrences. The possible includes those things that are random, probable, and improbable. The possible is what permits choice and creativity on the part of the rhetor but is often limited by codes of intelligibility.

Possibility is "reined" in by what is considered probable (Gaonkar, "Contingency and Probability" 153). Aristotle defines probability as "a thing that usually happens; not, however, as some definitions would suggest, anything whatever that usually happens" (10). In other words, Aristotle is saying that the probable is what usually happens for a reason; it is not randomly reoccurring. The probable is what usually occurs because of *doxa*. The rhetorical strategy and resulting outcome of a speech or text is "probable" because it is doxa that serves as a justification for the strategy for a rhetorical decision or for a way to account for the resonance or effectiveness of a rhetorical choice. This is because doxastic knowledge determines what is sensical and intelligible and is also the knowledge shared by most and can be accessed by the

greatest number of people. The term probable or probability is important to Aristotle, and as I will demonstrate, most of rhetorical studies, because it not only prevents us from having to "peer into the abyss," to confront the radically improbable or unimaginable, it also gives us comfort that events are predictable and controllable (Gaonkar, "Contingency and Probability" 153). Gaonkar asserts that the tendency to think of the function of rhetoric as concerning that which is probable, or reliant on *doxa*, has a kind of tyrannical effect that exerts a hegemonic control of the field thus limiting rhetorical critics' ability to identify and account for the improbable (153).

Following in a similar vein as Gaonkar I use the term improbability to refer to those rhetorical possibilities that are inventive, unexpected, and productive because they are unimaginable. The use of the improbable in this manner highlights the possible but unlikely rather than the probable outcomes in a rhetorical situation; it is an attempt to move us beyond probable notions of rhetoric and to acknowledge the presence and potentiality of the possible. Improbability, understood in this way, adds a powerful dimension to rhetoric, especially when considering rhetoric as a way to understand and incite social change. Rhetorical theory could produce more than an understanding or glorification of what is most likely or predictable. As a calculation of more or less likely outcomes it is important but when too much focus is on the probable it becomes tyrannical. The improbable or incalculable must also be considered as something more than a foreclosure, or mere impossibility, but rather as alternate possibilities that can come into being.

This conceptualization allows a rhetor and critic more than a perfunctory or brief listing of the usual range of options available to a speaking subject limited by the narrow confines of a situation. I want to be clear that I do not seek to *replace* or negate traditional understandings of rhetoric because this is a useful and often appropriate conceptualization. Rather, I seek to extend

our understanding of rhetoric to also encompass the radically incalculable. In this richer, wider consideration one can think of the terrain of rhetoric as extending beyond the limits of a situation and consider the way fields of discourse are constantly becoming fragmented and creating new configurations to produce new and currently unimaginable rhetorical possibilities.

Conceptualizing rhetoric in this larger sense means considering the entire *range* of the speaking situation by looking at what possibilities are opened or seemingly foreclosed; what rhetorical responses are possible not just predictable, appropriate, or even historic. It is the difference between considering what possible utterances are appropriate given the situation and considering what various apparatuses of power are aligning to make an utterance possible or impossible. That is why I stress the word *range* – I am interested in the very constitution of the possible, the social, what we even understand to be possible.

In exploring contemporary constructions of American identity I am led to improbable theories of rhetoric by necessity. I am able to ground and explore the theorization of rhetorical improbability while also demonstrating why a theory of improbablity matters to our understanding of rhetoric (now more than ever). The figure of the Self-Made Man is primarily a concept that is concerned with more traditional understandings of rhetoric as it relies on and perpetuates the *doxa* of American identity. Probable understandings of rhetoric were adequate when the representations of American identity were not fragmented and they possessed the ability to manage, absorb, and reframe challenges to their centrality. But as something like the Self-Made Man has largely lost this ability – the ability to rein in the unpredictable or nonsensical (in the literal sense of the term) – rhetoric has to confront the possibility that its guiding constitutive principles are limited as well. When the state of American *doxa* that concerns national identity is atrophied or bifurcated, it becomes apparent there is an undeniable

need for a theory that accounts for the improbable and highly unlikely outcomes that contemporary rhetoric produces.

When the improbable is primary for American identity, however, a space opens, forcing one to ask questions about how the very rules of national identity change when sense-making systems are compromised. Resulting rhetorical acts go beyond the predictable or appropriate and as a result rhetorical analysis must expand to consider the unlikely, the unexpected and the unpredictable. In what follows I will explore the rhetoric of the improbable, trace its lack of theorization within rhetorical studies, and explore the need for the consideration of the improbable when theorizing rhetoric.

Tracing the Privileging of Probability in Rhetoric

Uncertainty can be terrifying. When too many outcomes become imaginable unpredictability flourishes. The probable then serves as a way to domesticate those rhetorical situations that are unpredictable. As certainty and predictability are acquired it must be asked what could be lost. Uncertainty and unpredictability can be frightening but they also possess the power to incite change, for something to be different than it was before. As Dilip Gaonkar pushes the field of rhetoric to consider the importance of improbability, not merely probability, to our theorizations, we are forced to acknowledge the possible limitations that exist in traditional rhetorical theories. To illustrate how most theories of rhetoric are centered on the probable, I will briefly analyze several representative examples. It becomes apparent when considering how rhetoricians sought to understand the function of rhetoric in areas such as motive, the media, or ideology for example, that probability was a major theoretical underpinning to their assertions. Through a consideration of how the sensibility of probability informs theory it is also possible to explore some of the limitations of these theories because of

their repression of the improbable. What follows is an exploration of some of the theories of those scholars who have been most influential and visible in the field of rhetorical studies.

To begin, I consider the function of probability in the work of Aristotle. It is a fitting start since he is the one who initially theorized rhetoric as that which is contingent. The primacy of probability can be seen early on in Aristotle's explanation of persuasion and logic. In *Rhetoric* Aristotle defines rhetoric as, "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (6). This definition of rhetoric and its relation to persuasion requires that Aristotle explain how effective persuasion is achieved. His answer: modes of informal reasoning he calls example and enthymeme. These two concepts explain how rhetorical success can be achieved. Positioning rhetoric as the counterpart to dialectic allows Aristotle to define example and enthymeme:

> When we base the proof of proposition on a number of similar cases, this is induction in dialectic, example in rhetoric; when it is shown that , certain propositions being true, a further and quite distinct proposition must also be true in consequence, whether invariably or usually, this is called a syllogism in dialectic, enthymeme in rhetoric. (8)

For Aristotle then an example is an induction where some specific instance can be used to justify or support a general claim (The chimpanzee I am studying has learned sign language; therefore chimpanzees are creatures that are capable of learning sign language). Enthymemes use an implied or unspoken logic to make a claim (Joe is a good American, he is Christian. The assumption is that Christians are good Americans and that is why Joe is a good American).

Probability, and its constitutive counterpart *doxa*, informs how these types of reasoning function. The multiple meanings used to construct examples and enthymemes are ordered from what is probable. Regarding examples, the example provides evidence of the generality and

therefore demonstrates that the generality is possible. The example then serves as reference point for what is predictable and acceptable or as a type of guiding principle. Regarding the enthymeme, a relationship is created where if we believe in a relationship between A and B and B and C, then we must also believe in a relationship between A and C. This kind of reasoning allows us to make assumptions about certain people, phenomena, or situations based on what we know about things that are believed to be related in some way. This assumption creates a kind of predictability and knowledge of the thing in question. The realm of the general can be very similar to the everyday or general knowledge and it is our shared agreement that allows the enthymeme to resonate with us and make sense.

If Aristotle is considered the master theorist of persuasion, there can be no doubt that Kenneth Burke and his work on motive is just as central to contemporary rhetorical criticism. Burke's Dramatism was, "developed from the analysis of drama, treat[ing] language and thought primarily as modes of action" (Burke xxii). The corresponding rhetorical method, the pentad, "…offers a system of placement, and should enable us, by the systematic manipulation of the terms, to 'generate,' or 'anticipate' the various classes of motivational theory" (Burke xxiii). Both Dramatism and the Burkean pentad share an unspoken reliance on probability. While it is fair to acknowledge that Burke's comedic frame does allow for the unexpected, historically rhetorical critics have most often employed the more probable Burkean constructs.

Burke sought to answer the question, "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (xv). He used five terms as "generating principles" for this investigation and found that, "… any complete statement about motives will offer *some kind of* answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" [author's emphasis] (Burke xv). He

felt that through isolating and examining ambiguities we could arrive at answers, "Accordingly, what we want is *not terms that avoid ambiguity*, but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise*" [author's emphasis] (Burke xviii).

Note the importance of ambiguity to Burke. That which is ambiguous has multiple meanings leading one to imagine that his theorization embraces the improbable. However, it is not improbability that informs Burke's theorizations but rather probability. Take, for example, the section "Container and Thing Contained: The Scene-Act Ratio" in *Grammar of Motives* (3-20). Here Burke claims that "the scene contains the act" and "the scene contains the agents" (3). "The principles of consistency binding scene, act, and agent also lead to reverse applications. That is, the scene-act ratio either calls for acts in keeping with scenes or scenes in keeping with acts…" (9). The "principles of consistency" that Burke describes as binding the elements of scene, act, and agent are reliant on the principles of probability. The very ability for an agent to perform an act is dictated by the parameters of the scene. The scene sets the boundaries and codes for what types of acts and even what types of agents are capable of operating within the confines of its terrain. The acts and agents that are permissible are known and accepted because of probability. What has happened before in such a scene and what is commonly acceptable within a scene is in fact what is probable within a scene.

While Dramatism does have utility, it is also limiting in that possible outcomes are constrained by their relation to corresponding terms of the pentad. When rhetoric does not consider the improbable and when probability inhabits the forefront every situation seems to be predetermined. It is, for the rhetorical critic, merely a matter of deciding what pentadic term is primary and then charting how the scene should be read. It creates a formulaic and somewhat predictable mode of criticism. This approach can be short sighted because what is the rhetorical

critic to make of an occurrence where there is no fidelity between the pentadic terms? If open to the improbable nature of rhetoric one has to acknowledge that such an occurrence is possible. This discussion of Burke illustrates how limiting probability as it leads to one assuming everything should and can be understood simply by tracking the lines of the fidelity of terms that permitted or even dictated that a certain situation should play out in a particular way.

While Burke's theory of Dramatism accounted for how thinking through situations with the aid of the pentad might provide insight into a rhetor's motive, Lloyd Bitzer was more interested in using situations to identify and define rhetoric. He sought to create rules or guidelines that enabled one to say that the presence of certain elements were essential to classifying a situation as rhetorical. His well-known essay, "The Rhetorical Situation," is another example of how, while attempting to theorize rhetoric, an unspoken reliance on the logic of probability reasserts itself. In short, Bitzer states that rhetoric is an "invited, appropriate response given to an audience capable of rectifying a situation caused by an exigency" ("an imperfection marked by urgency"). Several aspects of this theorization rely heavily on conceptions of rhetorical probability.

Frequently multiple messages are uttered and perhaps are necessary when responding to an exigency. Bitzer is clear, however, that rhetorical responses are not only required and invited but also must be "fitting." The need for this clarification is directly connected to the nature of probability. In Bitzer's theory the aspect of situational rhetoric that he calls "constraints" are the "persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify exigence" (8). In his assertion Bitzer references the "historical situation" of the shooting and killing of President Kennedy. In his description of the event he explains that certain responses that were to be delivered by specific

rhetors and outlets were in a way predetermined. The intended audience and the appropriate audience response was something that one could know before the event occurred. *Doxa* and expectations, the very stuff of the intelligible and the probable, dictate and prescribe what function rhetoric will play, what form(s) it will take, who it shall be directed to, and what the goal of it shall be. While not all rhetorical situations are as determined in advance as the assassination of a president one cannot deny the force probability plays in determining what is fitting and effective rhetoric. If a rhetorical situation were guided more by a theory of improbability as opposed to probability then an exigence might be viewed differently as an opportunity, as a moment for something unexpected or transformative.

While some scholars account for the function and scope of rhetoric and others concern themselves with elements of human behavior that rhetoric illuminates, still another group of scholars resource philosophical developments for ways in which they might revitalize rhetoric. To be sure these "imports" have forced rhetoricians to reconsider staid assumptions and have, in numerous cases, helped revitalize the field and, more broadly, have contributed to the decades-long "linguistic turn" across the humanities. Even in these initiatives however, the privileging of probability that serves to guide, direct, and limit our understandings of rhetoric reigns. In the sections to follow I discuss several of these moments in rhetorical scholarship when new intellectual developments invited and perhaps even forced the field to address the role of ideology in rhetoric, the media as a rhetorical text, and the implications of post-structuralism on our understandings of rhetoric.

Ideology, a largely discursive phenomenon, is appropriately something that the field of rhetoric has sought to understand and theorize. One of the most notable contributions to rhetoric's understanding of ideology is Michael C. McGee's "The Ideograph: A Link Between

Rhetoric and Ideology." In this work McGee is attempting to understand a "vocabulary" that "could easily be mistaken for political philosophy" but is more accurately a "political language that manifests ideology" (444). This vocabulary often appears in political documents and circulates in culture as slogans; law, liberty, tyranny, and equality are a few examples. McGee found that an analysis of these slogans or *ideographs* revealed "interpenetrating 'systems' or 'structures' of public motives" and these structures were "'diachronic and 'synchronic' patterns of political consciousness" (444). These patterns could control power while influencing or determining the "shape and texture of each individual's 'reality'" (444). In other words, McGee believed that humans possess a "vocabulary of concepts that function as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief" (445). Therefore when a claim is warranted by an ideograph it is understood that people will "react predictably and automatically" (445).

It is the shared meaning of ideographs that creates a collectivity and it is often the disagreement over the definition of ideographs that causes discord within a society (447). The definition of an ideograph is not fixed, but rather, ideographs' significance is the result of "their concrete history of usages, not in their alleged idea-content." (448) McGee notes, we have never seen "equality" walking up the driveway; it is only through our use of the term that we know it exists and that it describes a certain phenomenon; this description must be one that is intelligible (448). This reliance on history for definition and applicability is the result of the synchronic and diachronic nature of ideographs. There are certain historical touchstones that give us the ability to define equality, make a case for its applicability, and ability to identify a situation as an example of equality or inequality. This is the diachronic nature of the ideograph. But, we are only called upon to activate the power or meaning of an ideograph when the situation calls for it and because no two situations are identical, the use of the ideograph will always have a nuanced

meaning – thus its synchronic nature. So it is this intersection of the diachronic meaning and the synchronic meaning of the ideograph which determines the usage, applicability, and force of the ideograph from situation to situation (450).

The relationship among and between ideographs also impacts this process; it is the relationship among and between terms that defines them. When we "engage in ideological argument, when we cause ideographs to *do work* in explaining, justifying, or guiding policy in specific situations, the relationship of ideographs changes" [author's original emphasis] (451). For example, "'equality is made meaningful, not within the clash of multiple usage, but rather in relationship with 'freedom'" (451). In summation, "The diachronic structure of an ideograph establishes the parameters, the category, of its meaning… Each ideograph is thus connected to all others as brain cells are linked by synapses, synchronically in one context at one specific moment" (453).

McGee's explanation of the ideograph is possible because of the centrality of probability in his design. Without the underlying reliance rhetoric has forged on probability McGee's explanation of the synchronic and diachronic nature of ideographs and their interrelated form would wield less force. The reaction to or application of the ideograph relies on previous definitions, the stuff of doxa, to be understood as sensical or appropriate, i.e. probable. The relationship among ideographs also acts as a type of probability because the terms only make sense and their legitimacy when enacted can only be tested in comparison to corresponding terms. For example, we often say that a situation lacks a certain amount of "equality" because a certain amount of "freedom" is being withheld. Therefore, even the constituting nature of the relationship among ideographs relies on the privileging of the probable. The popularity and utility of this method comes at a cost. The result is searching for a certain common denominator

of society – the least objectionable and least surprising discursive option. In short, the utility of the ideograph relies on the predictable by excluding the variable and the unknown.

McGee's focus on the intersection of the synchronic and diachronic could be viewed as limiting from a rhetorical perspective. Certainly the diachronic nature of the term is essential because without a history in our culture the term would not be identifiable as an ideograph; the term would not possess that ideological force. However, if McGee had viewed the relationship between the synchronic and diachronic nature of an ideographic term as less fixed then perhaps his theory would consider more of the improbable rather than relying on the probable. If the relationship between the diachronic and synchronic was not so binding in McGee's theorization, then perhaps new imaginings, usages, or definitions of ideographs would be possible or conceivable. Also, rhetorical critics would be more likely to recognize them when they occur. By linking the past and present meaning of the ideograph in a manner that renders them enmeshed, the possibility to push the characterization of the term is limited and therefore its ability to render effects in the material world will also be viewed as limited. It is a type of deferral to the diachronic that in a way prescribes the ways in which the ideograph can be understood, applied, or defined and again robs rhetoric of its contingent nature while simultaneously reifying the centrality of probability.

The twentieth century saw the rise of technology and its influence on culture as a significant circulator of rhetorical messages that could not be ignored by rhetorical scholars. Celeste Michelle Condit's "Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy" looks at not only the influence of the media on culture but on academic philosophies as well. The popular notion of polysemy as a laudable source of subversion was brought into question by Condit and again it is the logic of probability that shapes her assertions. As she tells the story, Condit witnessed many scholars

praising and perhaps having too much faith in the notion of polysemy when reading texts, especially media texts. Polysemy was applauded as a liberatory or subversive mode of reading a text because although the text creator may have had a certain interpretation in mind the reader was empowered to construct a different read of the text. Therefore, multiple and varied meanings were carried by every text, and the reader could interpret or put a text to use in a way that the text creator could not or would not envision or intend. Condit challenged this view as Pollyanish, arguing that individuals were not engaging texts in truly polysemic ways. "Polyvalence," she suggested, was a more accurate way to describe the readings that were being rendered. Therefore, Condit asserts that people are not reading texts differently so much as they are reading texts in the same way and gleaning the same meaning from them and it is rather the value they give the texts as they are relevant to their lives that differs.

Condit's impulse to be leery of a theoretical offering such as polysemy is consistent with rhetoric's unspoken reliance upon probability. Condit's concern over polysemy largely centers around questions of the message producer, encoding/decoding, and audience reception. The centrality of probability to rhetoric actually gives the authority of message production back to the speaker or creator of the rhetorical text. Probability plays a large role in how a message will be constructed and how the recipient is thought to decode it. Because rhetoric is reliant on doxastic knowledge it is thought that there are only so many possible reads that are sensical. Assuming probability ensures, in theory, that meaning will be interpreted in a predictable manner because the message creator and the receiver are both using the same system of codes to make sense of the signs that constitute the text. Again, this goes back to the probable and its direct relationship to what is intelligible in a given culture. This orientation supports Condit's assertion of polyvalence and while her qualitative research supported her theorization it could be argued it

was in many ways superfluous because one really only needs to reference the probable nature of rhetoric to demonstrate this point.

In this example of rhetoric's reliance on probability we witness what was an exciting moment in the construction, use, and interpretation of texts shut down by an enduring tendency of rhetorical theorists. Polysemy is indeed much more open to improbable constructions and a great amount of uncertainty that is produced when one views texts as polysemic, not polyvalent. This perhaps serves as a moment when rhetoric is forced, in the words of Gaonkar, to stare into the "abyss" ("Contingency and Probability" 153). Indeed Gaonkar believes it was the uncertain, unpredictable nature of rhetorical practices that were so troubling to Plato and it was the calming, predictive (and perhaps prescriptive) nature of probability that Aristotle used to reassure him. When faced with a moment where some of the tenets of the canon are called into question – speaker, text, message, audience – Condit implies to her readers that it is polyvalence that will reassert the functioning of rhetoric as concerning the probable not the improbable. This is unfortunate because it potentially robs rhetorical studies from considering the transformative potential of polysemy.

One of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century was Michel Foucault. Not surprisingly a scholar of his magnitude who sought to understand the functioning of discourse could not be ignored by the field of rhetoric. Prolific scholars such as Raymie McKerrow, Barbara Biesecker, and Ronald Greene used various aspects of Foucault's theories to develop, challenge, and augment rhetorical theory and criticism. Still, McKerrow's critical rhetoric, Biesecker's notion of reading a grid of intelligibility, and Greene's proposal of a materialist rhetoric all relies on the centrality of probability when theorizing rhetoric. The works of the scholars referenced here relies more on a theory of probability because Foucault too relies on the

historical tendency to place the discursive within the realm of the probable. Indeed, I would argue that Michel Foucault's work *Archaeology of Knowledge* is in many ways a contemporary theory of probability. To explain this assertion a summary of this work is necessary.

The central theoretical contribution of *Archaeology of Knowledge* is Foucault's description of the function of discourse. Foucault's foundational concept, the discursive formation, describes the network of discourse that animates a culture and society. The primary components of the formation are statements, discourses, and utterances. The terms can seem misleading as Foucault's use of them is a bit different from their traditional meanings. Statements, in this vocabulary, are the rules or conditions that permit certain utterances to make sense. Discourses are practices that are associated with and permitted by statements. Utterances are merely what *is,* and to a certain extent, what *can* be said. These various concepts are interrelated and must be considered together to grasp Foucault's understanding of the function of discourse. Foucault explains that,

> …the statements may be linked to one another in a type of discourse; one tries in this way to discover how the recurrent elements of statements can reappear, dissociate, recompose, gain in extension of determination, be taken up into new logical structures, acquire, on the other hand, new semantic contents, and constitute partial organizations among themselves. (60)

Statements should also be understood as something that "circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realization of desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation of rivalry" (Foucault 105).

If a discourse is not consistent with the formation it does not make sense and cannot be understood. Foucault explains it in this way, "… the term discourse can be defined as the group

of statements that belong to a single system of formation… thus I shall be able to speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric history" (107-108). This illustrates that multiple discourses are functioning within one formation, following the rules and conditions of possibility of the statements, and this is what makes an utterance ("a group of signs that is emitted") understood by those living under the structure of the formation.

Foucault then establishes a theory of intelligibility, which is why a discursive formation is a theory of probability. To know what possible moves one can make, which utterances are sensical and effective, an individual must know what is permissible by the formation. What occurs at the level of the statement is determined by what is acceptable, predictable, or to use Foucault's language, what is mappable. In Foucault's world one is always subject to the rules and conditions of the formation with the rare exception of "ruptures" that are so monumental and uncommon an individual is not likely to witness one in their lifetime.

Foucault then presents us with a nuanced form and understanding of probability in the notion of actions and utterances being "mappable." For Foucault probability is not merely about what is likely but is also about what is unlikely; what some might even call improbable. Where Foucault stops short of being radically contingent is the fact that nothing can escape the positivity of the stated and this is because every utterance is guided and permitted by the rules of the formation. This can be seen in his theory of power where even resistance is the other side of power; wherever one finds power one will also find resistance. Foucault can be viewed as limiting in that even the improbable is a range that can be known in advance – mappable.

An Opening in the Field of Rhetoric to Account for the Improbable

Some scholars of rhetoric are now seeking to explore the improbable because they believe it provides more rhetorical possibilities and is a more appropriate conceptualization of particular situations. An example of such a scholar is Michael Pfau and his alternative to Walton's dichotomy approach for understanding fear appeals. According to Pfau in Walton's theorization of scare tactics, the rhetor presents a targeted audience with an action to take and a refusal to take such action will result in death or disaster (220). To accomplish this recharacterization Pfau looks to Aristotle and the distinction he made between contingent and necessary situations. For moments that instill fear to be productive, deliberative, and to open a space for political debate, it is necessary for humans to view such events as contingent rather than necessary (Pfau 223). If an event is contingent as opposed to necessary then hope exists because humans possess the ability to change or alter the outcome of these events when they arise. While Pfau does not directly challenge the sometimes narrow range of possibilities created by positioning rhetorical outcomes as probable, the gesture is made to reposition rhetoric as considering and tending to improbable phenomena.

J. Blake Scott's reconsideration of kairos, a concept related to probability, offers a space where rhetoric might reconsider the importance of improbability in rhetorical situations. Kairos, or the opportune moment, is often the result of an event that serves as an advantageous rhetorical moment. Scott asserts that the anthrax scare would seem to produce an exigency that created a type of kairos "that was about management of future risk, both as a construction and a set of potential material effects" (116). The pharmaceutical industry is presented with the opportunity to create a new image for itself while simultaneously solidifying its political influence and profit margins by offering a sense of security to the American public should there be a bioterrorist threat. Rather than performing what could be viewed as a traditional read of the situation in

which Scott would harness kairos as a way to detail the rhetorical decisions and effects of the pharmaceutical industry's response to the anthrax outbreak, he seeks instead to offer an "alternative notion" of kairos – "one that complements and complicates traditional notions – indeterminate response to distributed, transforming, immeasurable, and, to some extent, uncontrollable global risk" (116-117). I would argue that Scott's rendering of kairos emphasizes the improbable more than the probable because his theorization is "based less on the present's relationship to the past than on its construction from the future, less on human agency than on indeterminacy and unpredictability, and less on modernist control than on uninsurability" (117).

Scott's work shows that "risks and their corresponding opportunities cannot easily be anticipated, shaped, avoided, controlled, or even managed" (136). When this is true then, Scott asserts, "kairos and rhetoric might be viewed less as seizing an advantage whether created or inherited than as adjusting, with no clearly foreseeable effects, to ongoing and projected knowledge-power relations that are continuously circulating, mutating, and affecting" (136). Thus Scott is offering us something more than another probable theory of rhetoric but instead looks at the uncertain; he peers into the "abyss" and sees it as a space of opportunity for exciting rhetorical invention and text production. Scholarship such as this forces us to rethink core concepts of rhetoric because, as Scott's essay illustrates, "the rhetorical staging of and response to risk can give the illusion of control, it can also shatter this illusion" (138). These efforts, however, are still dwarfed by the overwhelming tendency to favor the probable in rhetoric. It is against this tendency that this project joins the efforts of Pfau, Scott, and others seeking a way to preserve the open-ended undecidability of rhetorical action. This project, however, differs from Scott's because my primary objective is to offer a complement to traditional rhetorical theories by viewing improbability to be at times primary to the function of rhetoric as well as by

providing a theoretical basis for accounting for the emergence of the improbable. To accomplish such a task I look to the cultural studies notion of conjuncture.

Reading the Conjuncture to Understand of the Function of Improbability in Rhetoric.

Cultural Studies in the Future Tense is Lawrence Grossberg's effort to understand the contemporary conjuncture of the United States. A conjuncture is the overlapping of contexts or "a description of a social formation as fractured and conflictual, along multiple axes, planes, and scales, constantly in search of temporary balances or structural stabilities through a variety of practices and processes of struggle and negotiation" (Grossberg, *Cultural Studies* 40-41). Conjunctures are those moments where contestations and struggles are the most visible and persistent. I will be explaining the concept of conjuncture more thoroughly below as I identify some of Grossberg's key terms and concepts while also discussing how they function together and inform one another, with the emphasis on the perspective of a rhetorical critic.

Grossberg: Key Terms and Concepts

When approaching a rhetorical text from the position of a critic who engages in conjunctural analysis one is able to account for the conditions leading up the formation of the text and also able to then track how the text does or will act as an informing factor in another rhetoric. In what follows I will detail how a rhetorical critic can use the work of Lawrence Grossberg to perform criticism by providing the steps one would follow. The first term that I will define and that should be identified by the critic is the problem-space.

The Problem-Space

Problem-spaces are not necessarily singular and at times can overlap. They direct how we think, feel, and approach situations given the way the space situates our values and beliefs. Different problem-spaces develop, morph, disappear, and take on less importance. Grossberg

identifies several examples of common problem-spaces that cultural studies has grappled with over the years: post-coloniality, rapid and radical cultural change, agency and resistance, subjectivity, national political and economic struggle, and historical periodization.

This term "problem-space" describes "what constitutes the unity of the conjuncture" as will be discussed below (Grossberg, *Cultural Studies* 41). It can also be understood as a "problematic" or a "social crisis of sorts" (Grossberg, *Cultural Studies* 41). We know how to identify a problem-space because it is a moment when "instabilities and contradictions appear at almost every point of the social formation and when the struggles become visible and self-conscious" (Grossberg, *Cultural Studies* 41).

An example of a contemporary problem-space in the United States is the changing nature of gender roles and norms. New things are now possible for men, women, and those of indeterminate sex that were not accepted, conceivable, or part of national discourse just ten years ago. The notion that gender roles, and to a certain extent understandings of one's biological sex, are uncertain, fluid, or in the process of becoming other is exciting to some and terrifying, if not an abomination, to others. The presence of changing gender norms is something that is influential to the entire American social formation and as such qualifies as a problem-space.

Conjuncture

The next concept that must be addressed is conjuncture. This concept is central, according to Lawrence Grossberg, to the work of cultural studies and I would argue that it adds a great deal to a rhetorical critic's consideration of text. Simply put, conjuncture is very much like super context. Grossberg defines it as a fractured and conflicting social formation whose unity is "always temporary and fractured" (*Cultural Studies* 40-41). Another way of stating this is to think of a conjuncture as a series of contexts that intersect to form the conditions for a particular

text to emerge. These various contexts are not fixed and permanent in that they can and do shift. Different contexts come into contact with one another and form what is often referred to as a "nodal" or "condensation" point. This intersection creates the space that not only gives rise to a rhetorical text but oftentimes explains the reason or necessity for its existence. The contexts can intersect in unexpected ways providing the possibility for the unimaginable to occur.

To illustrate the ways in which identifying the problem-space and the various contexts (vectors) of the conjuncture aid in understanding the rhetorical function of a text let us consider a seemingly benign animated film, *The Croods*. The tagline of the film, "Are you better off now than you were 4 million years ago?" echoes the common American sentiment of continual progress and the notion that each generation will do better than the last. The film positions two males against one another: Grug, the strong Neanderthal patriarch, and Guy, the modern, ingenious human. Guy encounters Grug's adventure seeking daughter Eep and explains to her that the world is ending. The Croods must flee the old land and ways if they are to survive. Grug is resistant and threatened by Guy but eventually comes to see that he must adapt if he and his family are to survive.

As we settle into the twenty-first century many of the underpinning contexts of American masculinity have been delegitimized and challenged. Increased gender equality has resulted in women becoming more visible and powerful in political and economic spheres. American youth search for a new path different from that of previous generations. The nature of fatherhood is being challenged and reimagined as never before. September 11th shocked and frightened the nation, resulting in a diminished sense of American exceptionalism. The economic crisis left many questioning the viability of capitalism and generated feelings of hopelessness among the working class. When identifying each of these contexts it is important to remember that contexts

can be conceived of as vectors since these contexts do not merely constitute the space where *The Croods* emerge but where other texts appear as well; in this way a context can be visualized as a line or vector because it can cut across and inform other spaces. In other words, a single context can be part of and constitute multiple conjunctures. Returning to how this helps us understand *The Croods*, all of these contexts intersect creating stress on our understandings of masculinity within American culture and leaving us to wonder what is the exemplar man of the twenty-first century to look like? The conjuncture shows us that *The Croods* does not speak to one anxiety nor is it a response to one specific contextual influence, rather, it the amalgamation of the contexts mentioned above that constitutes the conjuncture, that produces the possibility for such a children's film.

Domains

The various vectors of a conjuncture are informed by, influence, and cut across what Grossberg calls domains. These various domains constitute a social totality which in many ways resembles Foucault's theorization of the discursive formation, which is constituted by a series of discursive fields. In *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense,* Grossberg focuses on what he believes to be the most influential and prominent domains of our modern age: the economic, the cultural, and the political.

What makes his work different from that of others is that, while he recognizes the interconnected and interrelated nature of the various discursive fields that constitute the social totality, he theorizes that each of these domains possesses its own constituting logic that is central to its formation. This means that these domains are simultaneously embedded and disembedded within the social totality; embedded because they are part of the totality but also disembedded because there is a logic particular to each domain that informs its constitution.

While it is not necessary to consider all three domains he identifies when performing a conjunctural analysis, a discussion of each fleshes out Grossberg's approach to modern times as well as illustrates why his theory is particularly suited to understanding the improbable nature of rhetoric.

The economic domain is constituted by a logic of commensuration. The function of the economic domain is to produce value. Grossberg explains that commensuration is about comparison and calculation. To determine value a comparison of two things must be made to calculate the worth of two items. Grossberg is clear that this comparison and calculation are never matters of translation. This is an important point for Grossberg because if two things are to be equated as equal or comparable then the individuals calculating the value must clearly understand the composition of what is being compared. For example when someone states that employees should be excused from work to celebrate Yom Kippur or Eid el-Fitr they are recognizing that these holidays are equal in value to Christmas. There is an equal value or worth given to all three holidays and therefore they should be treated as equal by the employer. This example illustrates not only the concept but also, as Grossberg asserts, that the discourse of the economic is not specific to just actual economics but that it can also be applied to other areas of life like a circulating metaphor.

The domain of culture is constituted by the logic of mediation (translation) and its primary function is that of managing, processing, and producing affect. Cultural apparatuses then act as "coding machines" and these machines produce difference and distance through a creation of borders (*Cultural Studies* 199). The logic of mediation has a single function and that is to provide the necessary compensation for a lack (a thing that is imagined to be missing, thus rendering one not whole). The domain of the cultural for Grossberg then is where a uniting form

of communication and community is forged by producing a form of human existence (*Cultural Studies* 188). One can look at Sarah Palin and her discourse representing Tea Party politics as a type of coding machine. While she provides an interpretation of various events and makes assertions about where such events will lead us she is coding the situation and eliciting a certain affective response from her listeners. These characterizations are often aimed at revealing the ways in which the America her supporters believe in and love is in danger of being destroyed. This longing to be rendered whole, to be a *real* American living in *real* America, is an example of Palin simultaneously producing and holding the answer to fulfilling a felt lack. This discourse also functions to produce clear boundaries between what can and cannot be considered "real Americans." This, in Grossberg's terms, would be "mediation" because she provides the defining characteristics necessary to code one as American or not.

The domain of the political is constituted by the logic of capture where various apparatuses of power seek to regulate and control behavior. Informed by the work of Deleuze and Guatarri, Grossberg explains that "'apparatuses of capture'… produce assemblages, the elements of which resonate together, embodying forms of 'consistency'" (*Cultural Studies* 252). These assemblages are "always escaping themselves, defined not by homogenization or even totalization but by resonances and principles of consistency" (*Cultural Studies* 252). Consistency is created through the coding of the assemblages to make them appear to operate as, and belong to, a whole. This is work that must constantly be pursued and maintained. The political realm is where this work is consistently done. It can be politicians, activists, individuals, or advertisers that are constantly seeking to secure a space open to be captured and coded. An example would be the marriage equality debate. This debate provides a space that is open to capture. One group could code this debate as an example of how America is becoming

something other than it was envisioned to be and creates an assemblage where this debate becomes coupled with other debates concerning healthcare and national security.

Sensibility, Articulation, and Uptake

To fully understand the importance of rhetoric in Grossberg's theorization I now turn to the last set of concepts that need to be addressed: sensibility, articulation, and uptake. In this discussion it becomes apparent that Grossberg's theory really is one that accounts for the function of rhetoric since these terms illustrate how discourses are produced, travel, and circulated.

In *We Gotta Get Outta This Place* Grossberg discusses his concepts of "articulation" and "uptake," which are terms he uses to explain what can be the unexpected outcomes of rhetorical practices. The objects of articulation and uptake are sensibilities. A sensibility is something that Grossberg likens to "taste." This is useful because he is attempting to understand popular culture and something like "taste" is subjective and swayable in the way opinion is. Sensibilities, or tastes, can change and shift given the nature of the popular. A sensibility resembles a Foucauldian statement in that it structures what can and does occur in a formation as a "sensibility locates the particular planes and organizations of effects that dominate the formation it governs" (*We Gotta Get Out* 73). There can be and are multiple sensibilities in a formation but one will be *dominant*[1]. We can only understand how elements of a formation fit together, what Grossberg calls "alliances," because of the sensibilities at play. Sensibilities do not solely belong to certain practices or a specific social group, hence their ability to travel to different formations. Sensibilities are "articulated" to different formations and populations and

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[1] This seems to be a precursor to Grossberg's theorization of a domain's "constituting logic."

thus they are the source of struggle that defines the politics of culture. When a sensibility is adapted across domains this is known as "uptake."

When an "uptake" of sensibility occurs it will manifest itself in practices. A series of practices that produce effects are what Grossberg labels "planes of effects." Like sensibilities these "planes" cut across and enter various domains. For example, the plane of signification is a series of practices that informs how we operate within the social totality; these practices are consistent with a sensibility. When a woman can be signified as incapable of engaging in combat in the domain of the military this sensibility has the potential to travel to other spaces in the totality thus rendering women coded as being less able, strong, and adept at performing a task in not only a combat situation but also in a workplace or government. Even though this discourse was not created specifically to impact a woman's ability to enter into other male spaces the traveling or the uptake of the sensibility results in just that. The theory of uptake also recognizes that because different domains will have varying levels of investment in the practice it will have less presence or dominance in a given field.

The notion of investment is an important one to Grossberg. It is necessary for understanding why certain practices or ideologies gain traction and others do not. Investment can be understood in relation to affect. It is important to make a distinction between affect and emotion. The two are not synonymous. Christian Lundberg explains this distinction in that "emotion describes a subjectively felt state, affect describes the set of forces, investments, logics, relations, and practices of subjectivization that are conditions of possibility for emotion" (390). In other words, affect accounts for the very conditions necessary for how one feels. An example of this would be how different cultures would react to the idea of an arranged marriage. The emotional reaction, or "subjectively felt state," is such because of the different cultural values

and logics that inform how one would view such an arrangement. Affect is necessary for understanding the role of investment because affect identifies and explains the level and the strength of an investment. These investments "anchor" individuals in certain practices, experiences, meanings, and identities (*We Gotta Get Out* 80). Therefore, the "affective plane," according to Grossberg is organized by "mattering maps" (or "investment portfolios") and these maps direct how people invest in the world. Affect then is a psychology of belief, and the degree of investment determines the degree of effectiveness of an ideology, or if it is effective at all (82).

One space where this is most apparent is pop culture since it is largely cut through by the affective plane. This is the space, according to Grossberg, where people give others the authority to shape their identity and position them in certain relations of power (*We Gotta Get Out* 83). If something matters, if you are invested in it, then it can speak for you; it is a "surrogate voice" (83). The affective plane, then, is in many ways a mechanism of belonging and identification. In our advanced capitalist society, pop culture becomes the primary space where affective relationships are articulated and where people construct their identities. Grossberg asserts this is largely because we really have no other space to construct or anchor our mattering maps (*We Gotta Get Out* 85). The affective plane, however, cuts across all fields because in each field there is a certain amount of investment or energy put into the practices occurring in a field. This theorization of affect allows for the improbable, and is useful to rhetorical critics, because it accounts for the unexpected and often unintended rhetorical outcomes that reach beyond the limits of a text or context. This is the case because one can never fully control or predict the audience of a text or the effect a text will produce.

Grossberg: A Theorist of Improbability

Grossberg is useful to any scholar interested in the improbable, but as a rhetorician I find him particularly useful because so much of his argument provides the condition for considering the impact of rhetoric. In other words, adapting his reading strategy focuses and clarifies the importance of rhetorical analysis rather than eliminating it since he is primarily concerned with how discursive fields are constructed and operate. Grossberg's approach enables a rhetorical critic to understand the whole range of a speaking situation, not just the particular one that happened. In other words, this approach enables a critic to understand the constitution of a field of discourse and not merely the discourse that occurs in one particular spot in the field. To accomplish this task, to understand what various apparatuses of power are aligning to make an utterance possible or impossible, a rhetorical critic must attend to and grapple with discursive fields. Therefore, what my analysis (as a rhetorician not a cultural studies scholar) accomplishes that Grossberg does not is that I read for the constituting logic of a field for a rhetorical text. The identification of the constituting logic of a field is arguably crucial for a rhetorical critic because it is the element that creates the conditions for what is able to be said, to establish what rhetorical possibilities exist. Grossberg does not examine any case studies with any real depth because his work is mostly of a theoretical nature. In this project I extend Grossberg's work by delving into how his theory of domain and constituting logics provide an account for the emergence and operation of a text.

Grossberg asserts that there is a way to operate outside of the totality of the formation (or what he would call the social totality) and it is this very outside that permits improbable texts. Where Foucault views fields as always embedded within the formation Grossberg views them as simultaneously embedded and disembedded. In other words, one can imagine each domain embedded in that totality but a portion of the domain is outside the totality making it

disembedded. This subtle distinction is an important one because it recognizes that while domains may be connected and mutually reinforcing they still operate by a distinct logic all their own constituting what Grossberg calls the "embedded/disembedded" nature of the fields.

The reading of the domains or discursive field occurs by isolating the problem space, which I defined above, and then reading the conjuncture, or intersecting contexts. Conjunctural analysis is arguably a mode of rhetorical analysis in the sense that conjunctural analysis provides a way to enhance a traditional textual analysis. When considering a text rhetorical critics miss many important factors if the text is approached as if it were a closed-system. Rhetorical factors such as author and audience may be considered but not the larger social, cultural, and political factors that make a text possible, and constrain and determine its potential for existence, expression, dissemination, interpretation, and intelligibility. A conjuncture is comprised of intersecting contexts that made the text possible and it also aids the critic in understanding how it was received, why, and the ways in which it resonates with an audience(s). Or, as Grossberg states, an examination of a conjuncture is, "an analysis of the actual, of how what is became actual – that is, of where we are, of what is going on…" (Forum 428). It could be argued that it is the conjuncture that makes a rhetoric necessary and possible, as John Clarke explains,

> For Grossberg (and for me), doing cultural studies has to be contextual. This refers to how the phenomena (the process, practices, and products) being studied can be constituted or constructed. Things are made possible, thinkable, desirable, or necessary by the conjunction of many contexts: contexts animate agents and actions. (311)

To provide an example of how a conjunctural analysis would enhance the work of a rhetorical critic I will turn again to the work of Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place.* In this book he is attempting to understand youth culture and its political apathy in light

of its relationship to rock culture. Grossberg begins by explaining that rock music must be understood and positioned within a "rock formation." This formation is constituted by its relations to objects of popular culture like television, film, advertising, comics, etc. Rock culture, for Grossberg, is such a dominant articulation of the rock formation that it can function as a metonym for it. For one to understand the rock formation, and the changes that occur within it, one must understand its context and the conditions that produce and constrain its existence because as structures of determination change the result is changes in the formation. For example, Grossberg notes that the economic and political shifts that occur in the 1980s create shifts in the rock formation. The government no longer functions as a mediator of competing interests, openly embraces a commitment to capital, and is supportive of efforts to increase corporate profits. There is a general loss of faith among the populace in the progress narrative of the United States, in individuals' belief they have a better life than their parents, and that their children's lives will be better than their own. The dominant ideology of society shifts to the Right. Notions of mobility and bettering one's life become solely based on economic gain.

These shifts impact the rock formation and these contexts help us understand and explain certain events in the 1980s. Traditionally, music stars would garner a local fan base before being signed to a record label. It was believed they had done the sufficient work of proving they could generate and sustain a fan base. In the 1980s we witness the production of stars that do not possess this type of history and if they do it does not have the importance to their career that it did in previous decades. Artists are selected and signed given their ability to cross over into different markets and speak to multiple audiences; it is as if the markets created the (need for the) star rather than the artist attracting the fans.

When considering this change in the rock formation Grossberg points out that he is saying more than "rock has become establishment culture" or that "rock has been colonized by corporate interests." He is rather, interested in a paradox that he sees in the 1980s that others miss. When rock does or attempts to act as political activism it is consumed and cheered by fans but often does not result in the politization of fans. As Grossberg notes, "this activity seems to have little impact on the rock formation, its various audiences or its relations to larger social struggles" (*We Gotta Get Out* 168). Grossberg finds this paradoxical because no real ideological shifts occur in the fans of rock and while musicians may be viewed as political their music and the rock formation are not necessarily articulated as political.

All of these factors and contexts detailed by Grossberg in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* are the very stuff of a conjunctural analysis; they are the forces that reveal the conditions of possibility for something like the rock formation. This consideration of factors is what makes a conjunctural analysis a richer and more in-depth textual analysis. Everything I have recounted from Grossberg's work would not be properly speaking "in" a text of 1980s rock. But when considering these factors we can understand how these songs and artists may be "political" but are not being received by, or are necessarily generating, politicized audiences. Doing an analysis of a song or an album alone would not produce this understanding of the text, because lyrics and the musical composition would not be able to convey these realities. For example, a rhetorical analysis of a 1980s rock icon such as Tracy Chapman might include an analysis of the songs *Fast Car* and *Talkin' Bout a Revolution;* both of these songs are politically tinged and could be considered to produce an understanding of Chapman's ethos. One message that is clearly communicated in both of these songs is a criticism of the socio-economic disparities that exist in 1980s America. By performing a textual analysis a critic is able to see how Chapman is making

political commentary, providing a space of identification with her audience via narrative, and also urging her listeners to view themselves as agents capable of changing their life. The point of the conjunctural analysis is not necessarily to displace the possibility of such an important analysis but to condition and temper any insights gained from those endeavors by noting how the arrangement of the rock formation more generally, not just Chapman specifically, works to facilitate the seeming connection between her and her fans.

In summation, Grossberg provides me a vocabulary and reading protocol to guide and inform rhetorical analysis. By using his work I am able to account for all external influences not in the text but that are extremely important to the creation and function of it. Grossberg's theorization allows a critic to account for the contextual conditions that position the text within various discursive fields and these conditions are important when considering why the text was created. What was the exigence or need for the text? What codes of intelligibility or discourses informed or constrained the rhetor when constructing the text and how do these things inform how the audience may receive or interpret the text? Conjunctural analysis allows a critic to isolate the nodal point, or various intersecting contexts, which produces the perfect spot across fields of discourse in a social totality for the text to emerge. If any of these contexts were other than what they are when the text emerges the rhetor would have different rhetorical options and would have to perhaps make very different decisions. Grossberg's framework also allows the critic to track the life and rhetorical impact of a text after its inception to a certain degree. The text produces or promotes a certain type of sensibility. This sensibility, as described above, has the ability to travel to other discursive fields, to inform or rub up against other sensibilities, and, perhaps more importantly, a text possesses the potential to create a context that serves as a factor in a future conjuncture. Grossberg provides a critic with a way of thinking about the improbable

outcomes of rhetoric by giving us the explanation of the various domains possessing their constituting logic. This discursive space, which operates somewhat independently from the rest of the totality, acts as an invaluable rhetorical resource for a rhetor. By referencing or acting within the rules and codes of the constituting logic something improbable, unlikely, or unimaginable can be the result of rhetorical invention. This is because the domain's constituting logic provides a space for a rhetor to act or invent in a way that the rest of the social totality and its corresponding *doxa* would not permit. In short, Grossberg can aid critics in accounting for and understanding the birth, life, and demise of rhetorical texts.

Thematic Analysis

The final methodological approach that I must address is thematic analysis. I use this approach to provide an example of the operation of Grossberg's theory when considering a text that emerges from the hip hop formation. A thematic analysis is a critic's discernment of prominent themes that give order and force to a rhetorical text. When examining *Decoded* I focus on the reoccurring themes that are interwoven throughout the text of the book and that also serve as lines of argument for Jay-Z's claim to being the new incarnation of the Self-Made Man. I discovered the themes by identifying the lines of argument Jay-Z uses consistently throughout the text. He also poses these arguments through written word and the aid of visual appeals. These four arguments appear throughout the text and he demonstrates that, regardless of what period of his life he is discussing, he is consistently supporting these arguments. When charting Jay-Z's rhetorical claims these four arguments serve as the overarching structure for each claim and every claim acts to support one or several of these four major arguments.

Chapter 3: "Understanding the Problem-Space of Contested American Identity and the Conjuncture of the Hip Hop Formation."

Introduction

In this chapter I begin by exploring the conditions that give rise to the hip hop Hustler by further discussing the problem-space of contested American identity and the relevance of the Self-Made Man. I then perform a conjunctural analysis. Recall, as stated in chapter two, that the conjuncture is a series of contexts that intersect, creating a space for the emergence of a particular rhetoric or text. This space is often referred to as a nodal point because it is within this point of intersection that contexts inform and impact one another. If one of the contexts were absent or constituted differently, the nodal point would not contain the conditions necessary to give rise to that rhetoric.

As discussed in chapter two, contexts and nodal points all occur within the realm of what Grossberg labels a problem-space. The problem-space is a larger, enduring framework or phenomena that informs and provides insight into how the contexts in the conjuncture are arising, forming, intersecting, and informing one another. The problem-space that structures the conjuncture of the hip hop Hustler is contestations over American identity.

The Problem-Space of Contested American Identity and the Rhetorical Force of the Self-Made Man

In chapter one I detailed the various factors contributing to contestations over the constituting elements and corresponding representations of American identity. This persistent and highly contentious social issue is the problem-space that my project is positioned in. The persisting uncertainties produced by this problem-space inform the production, reception, and travel of rhetorical texts. One rhetorical construction that evidences the force of this problem-

space is the figure of the Self-Made Man. This figure has long possessed the ability to not only represent American identity, and its corresponding values and ideals, but has also done the rhetorical work of positioning white masculinity as the embodiment of what it means, and what it looks like, to be American. This figure, as it has been conventionally rendered, has lost some of its legitimacy and rhetorical force because of the increase in racial and ethnic diversity in America, changing gender roles, and the economic hardship and uncertainty that many Americans face. The corresponding discourses that accompany the Self-Made Man, those of the bootstrap myth and the American Dream, have also lost their traction with Americans, or at least in the form in which these narratives were originally and historically told.

The Face of the Nation

In the United States, national identity has been historically constructed as white and masculine. Representations of the Self-Made Man are rhetorical evidence of how this is achieved. Anne Norton states that figures such as the Self-Made Man, though we may never know them "in the flesh," are very much "present in our words and thoughts. We cite them in political debates and bring them to mind in our considerations of American nationality" (*Republic* 11). The Self-Made Man creates a logic and a series of discourses that the nation can follow, serving as a type of instructional aid of how Americans are to understand their identity, and to dictate the defining qualities of an American. This logic also establishes, condones, and preserves operating power structures. In the early nineteenth century an emerging capitalist market provided an environment where "men were free to create their own destinies, to find their own ways, to rise as high as they could, to write their own biographies" (Kimmel, *Manhood in America* 22). This new landscape created an understanding of an individual's success that persists today. There is a constant pressure to prove oneself, and the absolute failure or success

of an individual was, and continues to be, imagined as solely the result of their possession or lack of a strong work ethic and business sense. The Self-Made Man and the corresponding discourse of the American Dream form a sense making system so Americans understand what behaviors and values constitute national identity. It informs and perpetuates such cherished myths as American exceptionalism and bootstrap pullers, as well as discourses promoting capitalism as a good and productive practice, autonomy, and civility.

It is important to note that these rhetorical constructs not only produce a kind of shared understanding of American values and norms but also a face, or body, of the nation. Not surprisingly this face and body are white and masculine, thus rendering American identity white and masculine. To be other than white or masculine is in some ways to be not as American as others. The face of the nation as a white, masculine face is most often represented by the face of the president. Anne Norton asserts that the president not only serves a political and institutional function but also he functions as a sign (*Republic* 87). The president then presents "an image of the people to itself: singular, united, with a common material form and a single will" (Norton, *Republic* 121).

Camillia Griggers explains how something similar has happened in the world of fashion where the face of woman becomes the "white face of femininity." To further explain the way that a face can function as a sign and signify an entire population of people, Griggers uses Deleuze and Guattari's theory of facialization. Facialization is the name for a particular kind of territorialization. Territorialization, a concept also employed by Grossberg as discussed in chapter two, is described by Deleuze and Guattari as the capturing of a space via "coding machines." In other words, coding machines, or various apparatuses of power, signify a space with meaning. Griggers notes that in the fashion world the "white face of femininity" has

become despotic by capturing and coding any territory it reaches. One example Griggers provides is the fashion magazine, Japanese *Elle*. While intended for a Japanese audience, the magazine is signified by the "despotic face of white femininity." Griggers explains that Japanese *Elle* simultaneously deterritorializes a space of Japanese female identity by capturing the space via the publication of the magazine, and then reterritorializes the space with codes that signify Euronormative standards of beauty, thus encouraging Japanese women to view beauty as that which originates in the West, not the East, not in her (13). The "white face of femininity" becomes "despotic" according to Griggers, not only because it is ubiquitous internationally in the realm of fashion and media, but also because the face is simultaneously full and empty. It is full in that it is overly signified with meaning but yet empty in that the meaning is fluid enough to be adapted to various uses and contexts.

Just as Griggers explains the process through which the face of white femininity becomes the face of beauty this same process can be said to have occurred as the face of white masculinity has become despotic in regards to American identity. Via popular culture and political history the face of the nation has been represented as white and masculine and this face, while in varied forms and formulations, has historically been ubiquitous and also simultaneously full and empty. The Self-Made Man, and all the various narratives that (re)present him to the nation, also reaffirm and recode the face of the nation as a white, masculine face, thus, strengthening the understanding of American as white and masculine as well. One phenomenon that has emerged to challenge the white, masculine facialization of the nation, and by extension has augmented understandings of American identity, is the hip hop formation and its version of the Self-Made Man, the Hustler. Before exploring the conjuncture of the hip hop formation a definition of hip hop is necessary.

Defining Hip Hop

"Hip-hop wasn't kid stuff; it was the kind of tidal wave that rolls through once in a generation and takes everyone with it."

Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*

Before exploring the impact of hip hop on national and global culture it should be clearly defined. Rap is the music of hip hop, but it should be noted that other elements constitute hip hop as a *culture*. Bikari Kitwana explains that "graffiti art, breakdancing, rap music, style of dress, attitude, verbal language, body language, and urban-influenced lifestyle are all aspects of hip hop culture" (*Why White Kids* 12). Cheryl Keyes explains that hip-hop is a style that is an urban street expression and an attitude through which the "MC's use of street speech, dress, and body gestures authenticates his or her association with a street aesthetic" (123-124). Hip hop is primarily an "iteration of black language, black music, black style, and black youth culture" (Perry 2). There is a certain amount of hybridity and borrowing from other cultures that occurs but at its core hip hop is derived from black American oral culture and musical traditions (Perry 10).

Hip hop began in Bronx, New York in the 1970s but did not begin to garner popularity until the 1980s. It was largely a niche market. Run-DMC is the first major rap group to win over both young white fans while maintaining its core urban black fans. They also mark hip hop's parlay into the promotion of mainstream fashion and apparel by their landing an endorsement deal with Adidas shoes. This is central to the popularization of hip hop and rap since, as Nicole Fleetwood notes, "The affiliation between the product and rap group is significant because it set the stage for other rappers to endorse retail products. It marks an important transition of localized cultural practices associated with hip-hop into a growing culture

industry" (155). The cable music channel, MTV, was also responsible for bringing rap to America in the late 1980s through the early 1990s by airing up to twelve hours a day of rap programming and videos (Chang 419).

In 1991 the music industry realized that rap is no longer merely a niche market and has the potential to be highly profitable (Chang 416). This decade is often noted as the decade of hip hop. It was in this decade that hip hop becomes central to American culture. This is an important shift because black culture was no longer ancillary to American culture but actually constituted American culture. The word "urban," that is practically synonymous with hip hop, came to signify how "cultural change was emerging from cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago where young Blacks seemed to initiate style shifts and a cohort of hip, multiracial youth spread them" (Chang 418).

Alongside cultural developments it must be noted that technological advancements made the spread and rise of hip hop possible. In 1991 there is a marked increase in rap music's popularity and sales. This was accurately reported by a new technology called SoundScan. This technology was able to precisely account for record sales and proved that "pop" music would also now have to include rap music. The small, independent rap labels also greatly benefitted from this technology. Previously viewed as a niche market at best before, by 1991 large corporate music labels had to take the independent labels seriously because the profits to be made in the rap game could no longer be denied (Watkins 39-42).

The 1990s also marked the shift from hip hop being defined as black culture to becoming a "lifestyle" embraced by a multiracial group of Americans. This is largely due to the marketing and production of products that signified the hip hop lifestyle and state of mind (Chang 419).

Craig Watkins called this system of commodification a "formal hip-hop economy" that "developed strong synergies with corporate America" (58). Watkins further explains,

> In this corporate-driven climate hip-hop's influence widened considerably as a generation, who in another time and place would ordinarily be confined to society's margins, gained unprecedented access to print, music, video, and other media... the gold rush in hip hop produced a seemingly endless sea of opportunities in other industries like apparel, film, art, music video, and marketing. (Chang 58)

Artists became investors and celebrity endorsers of products strengthening their financial investments by using songs as marketing tools to promote the items and brands associated with their ever growing empires (Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars* 219). This led to media monopolies favoring artists that were not merely popular artists but those that could produce and sell products associated with the hip hop lifestyle. Jeff Chang explains that "in this new corporate order" a "synergy[y] of goods" occurred when a "song could become a movie could become a book could become a soundtrack could become a music video could become a videogame" (447). This resulted in the artists not only needing to create radio hits but also become "brands themselves, generating lifestyles based on their own ineffable beings" (Chang 447).

This commodification led to a cultural exchange between black and white culture, urban and affluent culture. Hip hop artists began to purchase and rap about luxury items. Some companies welcomed this endorsement while others did their best to distance themselves from the association. For those who did see this as an exciting or merely profitable option it brought different worlds into contact with one another creating unlikely partnerships and friendships. Designers Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren were among the first fashion houses to build these relationships. Tommy Hilfiger featured rap artists Coolio and Method Man in his 1996 fashion

show (Negus 100). The notion of the "good life," associated with these brands, became targeted towards and attainable by a much larger audience (Fleetwood 156).

Fashion lines have become as central to hip hop as rap music. Tricia Fleetwood notes that "[a]side from the music, itself, fashion continues to be the most profitable and recognized of the practices affiliated with hip-hop culture" (147). The hip hop mogul largely emerged from what came to be the natural progression of musician, producer to fashion designer and investor (Fleetwood 158). Consequently it was not only the mainstream, established fashion houses that benefitted from hip hop but also urban clothing companies. Companies not associated with music, but that produced hip hop fashion such as FUBU (For Us, By Us), were credited with being the originators of "urban sportswear" whose popularity expanded beyond black urban youth (Watkins 67-69).

The Hip Hop Conjuncture

There are various intersecting social and cultural conditions that give rise to hip hop. It is a musical genre, a culture, an attitude, and a movement. For this reason it "crystallizes and makes visible a variety of social tensions that are otherwise so widely scattered across disparate social knowledge formations as to go either unnoticed or unmentioned" (Smith 70). In what follows I track the various contexts that form the conjuncture that gives rise to hip hop.

Civil Rights

The civil rights movement marks a historical shift in the way Americans would come to view race, rights, and notions of equality. Although the movement was successful in bringing about legislation that prohibited racial discrimination, it was not able to diminish problems of poverty and employment that led to "despair and rage" within America's inner cities (Takaki 317). It was believed that after the civil rights movement that the next generation of black

Americans would face a "bright future," but rather they were often faced with "poor housing conditions, inferior education, precarious health status, and dwindling job prospects" (Hill-Collins 53). The civil rights, and other black rights movements, succeeded in creating a legacy of racial and cultural pride but failed to produce an economic plan that would alleviate poverty (Reeves 55).

This has naturally resulted in a post-civil rights black America who feels somewhat disillusioned. The triumphs of the era seem immaterial to many black youth still facing a bleak future, racism, and few employment opportunities. There has been a persistent sense that "their way," referring to the civil rights generation, did not work so a new way must be imagined that is more defiant and grounded in black culture (Watkins 192). This group of people is collectively known as the hip hop generation. Michael Eric Dyson explains these differing generational views,

> Civil rights folk said, 'We'll dress up and play the rules the white way and cross over.' Hip hop seized the reigns of its destiny and insisted that it make music its way, and white folk could cross over to them... They felt they'd make the white folks dress and talk like them – and we know, at least among their kids, they've been quite successful. (56)

The result is a sentiment among many blacks, but particularly within the inner cities, that assimilationist practices, and following rules and codes consistent with dominant structures, were simply not going to work.

Poverty in Black Urban America

As noted above, one of the main issues plaguing black Americans and leading to their discontent was the fact that the civil rights movement and its legislation did little to decrease poverty. In fact, beginning in the 1970s the United States began to experience an increase in

poverty due to the changing economy and globalization. The feminization of poverty hit female-headed households in black neighbors hard. The number of households headed by women increased 38.7 percent between 1970 and 1978 and these women suffered increased economic hardships due to deindustrialization, lack of day care, poor education, inadequate child support, an increase in teenaged pregnancies, and low-paying service jobs (Katz 275). Lack of public transit to outlying suburbs further hindered black Americans as many plants and offices moved to more suburban areas making these jobs inaccessible to inner city residents (Takaki 319). Jobs were even further removed from urban dwellers because of the rise in outsourcing. This reduced the already limited options for social mobility (Rose, *Black Noise* 27).

The Ronald Reagan administration is often cited as exacerbating black poverty (Katz 1986; Reeves 2008). In a 1987 television interview Thurgood Marshall stated that President Reagan was the worst president in regards to his civil rights record (Reeves 68). The "war on drugs" and dramatic cutbacks in social programs led to naming Reagan's term the "war on black people." By 1988, the end of Reagan's term, the black poverty rate had risen 33 percent (Reeves 32). The cuts to social programs and government aid, coupled with the growing unemployment rate, left many black urbanites feeling as though their lives were getting worse rather than improving during the 1980s post-civil rights era (Reeves 42). To add insult to injury, to garner support for federal cutbacks the Reagan administration began circulating "images of steaks in welfare freezers and Cadillacs in parking lots of public housing" and these images naturally upset working-class Americans who were themselves struggling due to oil shortages, inflation, and rising unemployment (Katz 278).

Poor Public Education

With few employment options a natural suggestion may be for one to obtain training or education so that one may have more opportunities for success. This suggestion is a moot point for many urban Americans because their basic education system does not provide the essential fundamental components necessary for higher learning. Jonathan Kozol details the disparities and disgrace of the public education offered to poor, black children nationwide in his books, *Savage Inequalities* and *The Shame of the Nation*. The widely known reasons for this include underfunding, overcrowded classrooms and buildings, understaffed schools, dilapidated facilities, apathetic and underpaid teaching and administration staffs, racial segregation, limited amounts of basic resources (such as textbooks and school supplies), and the lack of preparatory programs. Students are not being provided with the necessary foundation to pursue future success because they lack, through no fault of their own, the proper basic skills required to function and prosper in society.

The Crack Cocaine Epidemic

Confronted with limited educational or employment opportunities it is not unimaginable that people will turn to illegal means of survival. The crack epidemic that hit the United States in the 1980s flourished in the inner cities. Because of the depressing set of circumstances that urban residents faced, there were plenty of people looking to escape their pain or disappointment, and to benefit financially from the illegal drug market. Marcus Reeves notes that "crack cocaine rose in conjunction with climbing black unemployment, growing poverty rates, federal program cuts and the deindustrialization of urban centers nationwide" resulting in crack becoming "the driving force of an underground urban economy" (54-55). The communities based in housing projects began to deteriorate when crack entered their neighborhood (Kennedy 18).

The crack epidemic produced drug empires run by drug lords, gang members, and drug dealers. This illegal alternative is not only appealing but often viewed as one's only viable option. There is a logic that emerges in the inner city because of the bleak conditions that inform the lives of many young black males. David Kennedy explains that these young men were living in a world separate from most of America and it is a world with its own "rules," "standards," and "understandings" where young men "stand against a powerful, malevolent world and say to themselves and to each other, Prison's no big thing; I'm going to be dead by the time I'm twenty-five, so nothing really matters…" (20). If one views their lifespan to only be twenty-five years at most, there are no real legal job prospects available to you, virtually everyone around you is participating some way in the drug trade, and it is a career path readily available to you, there seems to be no other reasonable path to follow.

War on Drugs

As crime rates increased and media images of a dangerous "ghetto" flooded American television, the government would surely have to respond. Ronald Reagan's "War on Drugs" was the answer to this call. There was a shift from the "Just Say No" campaign to the "War on Drugs," largely because Americans were dissatisfied with the prevalence of drugs and drug crimes and a change in focus allowed President Reagan to create a scapegoat who could be held accountable and who could be persecuted (Mackey-Kallis & Hahn 17). While some measure needed to be taken, there are many critics of this campaign and its policy, and it is often referred to as the "War on Black People."

In 1986 Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. This legislation required mandatory sentencing for any drug related offense. The punishments were harsh. For example, if an individual was found in possession of 50 grams of crack cocaine, and it was their first offense, it

was an automatic mandatory 10 year prison sentence without parole; if it was an individual's second offense then it was a mandatory 20 year prison sentence without parole (Mackey-Kallis 1; Ogbar 156). Communication scholars Susan Mackey-Kallis and Dan Hahn analyzed the rhetoric of the war on drugs and revealed that in many ways the campaign was more about "creating a scapegoat for the nation's drug problem than actually addressing and resolving the problem" (2). They also assert that the campaign created "victims of racism, vigilantism, and unfair drug sentencing" rather than "medical attention and drug education" (2). These "victims" were mostly young, black males. Initially, the use of the term "war" was a fitting metaphor. President Reagan framed the selling and consumption of drugs as a threat to national security. The Latin American drug lords, the "cocaine killers," as Bush, Sr. named them, were cited as the initial villain of the drug war but they were far removed from American soil (Mackey-Kallis & Hahn 8). The figure who came to serve as the face of danger was the American "drug pusher" and coded, racist language was often used by the media when presenting the war on drugs to the American public (Mackey-Kallis & Hahn 15). The black community in urban areas became the politically expedient scapegoat for the nation's drug problems. There was a moral justification to rob people of their civil liberties and to use harsh law enforcement to root out the culprits in the drug trade (Mackey-Kallis & Hahn 14-16). Black urban Americans not only became more visible to the populace at large but became the repository for the ills of the nation.

Black Americans naturally felt targeted and unfairly treated as a result of these policies. By the late 1980s the country was gripped by a "political climate of drug hysteria" (Mackey-Kallis & Hahn 12). This hysteria led to the moral justification of robbing people of their civil liberties (Mackey-Kallis & Hahn 14). In the end the war on drugs became a war on race, the black race specifically. The largest jump in incarceration rates occurred in 1989, three years

after the inception of the war on drugs, and those incarceration rates were largely constituted by young, black males (Watkins 169).

The Legal System and Incarceration

The prison industrial complex has "become an indelible part of black and Latino youth consciousness" (Ogbar 173). The possibility of incarceration is a likely occurrence accepted by many young, black males in the United States. Therefore, prison and prison culture play large roles in the lives and narratives of many black youths. When one is a constant target in one's own neighborhood there is a feeling that one might as well engage in illegal activity because the likelihood of being wrongly accused is very high. Also, when the majority of your peers and those a mere generation before you have served prison time it becomes a normal and acceptable part of life. The result is prison becoming an important backdrop to rap (Ogbar 156).

The police represent not only the American legal system in the minds of urban black youth but also America in a general sense. For many black Americans the words *police* and *brutality* are synonymous (Rose, *Black Noise* 106). Criminologist David M. Kennedy feels that law enforcement is making the wrong choice in how they address the inner cities of the U.S. They operate by a policy of stopping and arresting everyone they can. This approach, according to Kennedy, is the result of law enforcement, and perhaps society at large, writing off these communities, viewing them as a corrupt people that "refuse to pursue legal work, lack values, and do not raise their children correctly" (17-18). There is a sense that America hates and targets black people, resulting in the need for Black people to create a new system, a system where they (urban black Americans) create the rules because the notion that they could pull themselves up by the proverbial bootstrap would never work for them in a *traditional sense*.

Imprisonment of black males continued to rise in the 1990s. Jeffrey Ogbar notes that more black people were imprisoned during the Clinton administration than during that of Reagan and Bush, Sr. (167). The Clinton administration also produced another piece of legislation that proved as harmful as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. In 1994 the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act allocated 7.9 billion dollars for states to build more prisons and it expanded its list of criminal offenses. These policies resulted in an increase of prisoners by nearly 400 percent between the years of 1980 and 2001; approximately two-thirds of those arrested were sentenced for nonviolent drug offenses (Ogbar 167). Currently, one in three black men will serve a felony prison sentence (Kennedy 16). Once released, black males return to the neighborhoods that created the conditions for their crimes and those wanting to turn lives around face few legal job prospects because of their criminal record. This results in the majority of urban black males being trapped in a cycle of crime.

Media Portrayals of Urban America

The news coverage of the drug activity in urban America makes the "hood" visible. This visibility granted Americans access to a space that was largely unknown before. The "underground economy" led to an increase in violence resulting in negative headlines and media portrayals of black youth (Reeves 68). In the early 1990s there was also the introduction of "ghetto" films. As audiences became familiar with actual events they would naturally be more receptive to consuming stereotypical images of poor, black America. *New Jack City*, *Boyz n the Hood*, *Juice*, and *Menace II Society* further support the notion that inner-city America was nothing more than drugs, violence, and crime. These films position crime as the most significant social problem facing the U.S.

Marcus Reeves explains that these media portrayals were actually misleading and perhaps served as fodder for politicians:

Constant news coverage of the crack epidemic, mushrooming gang activity, and urban violence… fed the nation's perception that crime, particularly youth crime, was on the rise, when in fact the nation's crime rate had been falling since 1991. Youth crime, which had peaked at 1993, was also on the decline. But that didn't stop politicians from pandering to the hysteria. (164)

Historically the black male body has represented and been scapegoated as the source of the nation's fear of violence and incivility (Belton 2). This is illustrated most clearly by the reoccurring figure of the Buck in popular culture. This is the common characterization of black men as inherently violent, athletic, and possessed by a propensity for criminal activity (Jackson II 30). These media representations are merely another iteration of this practice. Fear and anxiety led to the support of Congress for passing the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994, an act that resulted in the increased police patrolling of public housing communities, cuts in income support, and social services (Mann 21-22).

Culture Wars

The fear and anxiety surrounding the "hood" had benefitted politicians and other conservative activists since the 1980s and the inception of the "culture wars." Cultural conservatives and politicians sought to cut government funding for college campus art initiatives that promoted multiculturalism and inclusion of previously marginalized individuals. The culture war agenda was initially relegated to congressional debates and college campuses. These forums did not garner the type of media coverage and hype that the activists were seeking. By

targeting hip hop as something that contributes to moral decay, the conservative groups were able to infiltrate the news cycle and all the coverage and attention it garners (Chang 392-393).

The East Coast-West Coast Rivalry

Another incident that contributed to the visibility of the "hood" was the shooting deaths of rappers Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace, the latter more commonly known as The Notorious B.I.G. There were tensions between the West and East coast rap scenes that began stirring during the early 1990s. This public dispute, which included verbal assaults in rap lyrics and open challenges in the media, closely resembled the rivalries of gangs. The conflict further supported stereotypical assumptions that young, black males from the inner-city were violent and prone to infighting. At the age of twenty-five, Tupac Shakur was shot on September 7, 1996 and died a few days later. Shortly thereafter on March 9 1997, Christopher Wallace age twenty-four, was also shot. There was a great deal of speculation and controversy that Wallace's associates gunned Shakur and that Wallace's murder was committed in retaliation. These cases remain unsolved.

Multiculturalism

Hip hop's popularization and infiltration of American culture demonstrates that a shift in ideology and national identity has occurred. We are slowly moving away from, or at the very least investing less legitimacy in, the assimilationist practices prescribed by the centering and privileging of white masculinity. Homi Bhabha states that, "the time for 'assimilating' minorities to holistic and organic notions of cultural value has dramatically passed" (193). This phenomenon can be traced in the way in which hip hop is influencing America, because in many ways how we talk about race in America is via rap music (Rose, *Hip Hop Matters*).

The cable music television network, MTV, was responsible for bringing rap to all of America during the late 1980s through the mid-1990s airing up to as many as twelve hours a day of rap programming and videos (Chang 419). Essentially, MTV brought black culture to white America. Black culture was able to infiltrate American homes and the hearts and minds of white youth.

This visibility and accessibility would not have continued if there was not a felt need and desire for the programming. In the early 1990s the "multiculturalist fight for inclusion, recognition, and respect was moving into mainstream media as well into the halls of the nation's capital" (Reeves 125). A recognition of new racial dynamics came to be represented by the word "urban" to describe cultural changes in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago where "young Blacks seemed to initiate style shifts and a cohort of hip, multiracial youth spread them" (Chang 418). "Urban" no longer signified "poor, marginal, and untouchable" but rather it came to signify "vital, hip, and desirable"(Watkins 70-71).

It is during this time that urban black youth became the real players and shapers of American popular and youth culture. Jeff Chang explains,

> Hip-hop lifestyling offered, to use an advertising term, a complicated kind of aspirational quality. In one sense, hip-hop had triumphed over America in a way the civil rights movement never had. No matter the race, class, or geography, the kids wore the same clothes, spoke the same language, listened to the same music. Ice T and Chuck D saw this development as an unmitigated triumph of cultural desegregation. That was why, they said, white parents were so afraid of rap. (425)

Never in America's history had there been such a cultural exchange, an exchange in which the marginalized group became the hegemonic producer of culture (Potter 9).

None of this would have been possible if there was not a desire and need for black culture to be popularized. During this time period we witness a crisis of white identity. Multiculturalism forces, not only a shift in racial dynamics, but also in the ways that whiteness is constructed and understood.

White youths are presented with urban culture, causing them to question the assumed superiority and centrality of their whiteness, resulting in this generation of white Americans to search for a new identity, because older, more traditional constructions of whiteness seem unappealing. This context speaks strongly to the malaise surrounding national identity and the natural extension of it, that if national identity is called into question then the centrality of whiteness is called into question as well. Bakari Kitwana notes that, "in and of itself, Black popular culture impacting young whites in America wasn't altogether new" however "with the new realities of economies and race, Black popular culture became far more influential in the lives of young white Americans (*Why White Kids* 39).

Youth Culture

White consumption of hip hop is markedly different than the consumption by whites of other black musical genres of the past. It was different quantitatively in the sales and consumption of music, film, magazines, videos, and apparel and also qualitatively in regards to lifestyle, attitude, and language (Watkins 97). It is not surprising that hip hop launched a revolution in youth culture because the ways in which youth interact with, and engage in, hip hop culture is through the things that traditionally matter to young people such as "style, music, fashion, and a sense of generational purpose" (Watkins 148). Therefore, hip hop is arguably more influential and far reaching than other genres of music because more than any other music

form, it represents so much more than music, it also represents a lifestyle (Kitwana, *Why White Kids* xii).

This adaptation of lifestyle is important to note because it is not merely a superficial choice of what song to download or what apparel to buy. The hip hop lifestyle and its adaptation represent the embodiment of an *identity*. Russell Potter explains the ways in which Euro-American culture has been forced

> to take stock of its own costumes, lingo, and poses – that is, to see 'whiteness' as a quality; it is not surprising, in this light, that many young white kids in this century have turned to black culture to get culture, to search for identities. The logic of the 'same' – of white, middle-class world as a norm which never has to account for itself – is called violently into question by the Signification of difference, and this Signification has never been played as far to (and beyond) the limit as it has been by hip hop culture. (122)

In many ways hip hop is a gesture towards the future that multiculturalists idealize and strive to achieve. Even though hip hop is a black cultural construction it is promoted as a culture and movement that seeks to speak to and for everyone. Todd Fraley notes that if one were to look at the audience of a hip hop show, as compared to some other genre of music, the diversity in the audience is astounding and it is evident that hip hop creates "connections" that other genres simply do not (49).

Postmodernism

To also understand how hip hop is able to take hold of youth culture one must consider the postmodern move to blur or erase the distinction between "high" and "low" culture, as well as, the ways in which a postmodern bent results in the mixing and combining of various art forms in the twentieth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century a cultural shift began

due to the influx of immigrants and the migration of freed blacks to urban areas. Naturally these various groups of people were segregated based on economic, social, cultural, religious, and ethnic factors. As a result there was a decline in "a shared popular culture" but there is also the loss of blended cultures that could be characterized as "high, low, and folk cultures" (Levine 207-208). As cultures will do, there are more changes and shifts that occur throughout the century, and as a result culture has become "more expansive, more all embracing" (Levine 243). Levine points to the blurring of the lines of high and low culture when referencing a 1985 edition of *The New York Times* that listed the following under the headline "'Culture! Culture! Read All About It:' American Ballet Theater, Norman Mailer, Cannes Film Festival, Kiss, New York Shakespeare Festival, Santa Fe Light Opera, The Big Chill, Warren Beatty, Steven Spielberg, Thelonious Monk, Woody Allen, Mostly Mozart" (243). This illustrates the shift in culture that continues today, and the varied forms that culture can take, be it high or low brow or some combination.

The mixing of, or blurring of, the distinctions of high and low culture is indicative of what many call our "postmodern era." Simon During states that there are three components that constitute the postmodern era. First, Enlightenment notions that serve as the foundation of Western modernity, such as "progress, rationality, and scientific objectivity" have lost their legitimacy because they do not account for cultural differences. Second, there is no "confidence" that "high" or avant-garde art and culture have more value than "low" or popular culture. And third, we can no longer distinguish between the "real" and the "copy" or the "natural" and the "artificial" largely because of technological advancements and the presence and reach of these advancements (142).

Hip hop possesses features that are "widely recognized as characteristically postmodern" and these features are defined by Richard Shusterman as,

recycling and appropriation rather than unique and original creation, the eclectic mixing of styles, the enthusiastic embracing of mass-media technology, and culture, the challenging of modernist notions of aesthetic autonomy and artistic purity, and an emphasis on localized and temporal rather than the putatively universal and eternal. (614)

Structure of the Music Industry

Hip hop was popularized and disseminated initially through rap music. In the beginning the music industry viewed rap music as a niche market without much crossover appeal or profitability. Not surprisingly, as rap music begins to gain popularity and appeal with mainstream America the music industry sought to capitalize on this fact. Interestingly, it is thanks to many Jewish executives that rap music thrived in the early 1980s. There is a long history, beginning in the 1940s, of Jewish and black partnerships in the music industry. Nelson George asserts that it is only because of these alliances that hip hop survived because black and white music and radio executives were interested in promoting "white friendly artists" such as Michael Jackson (58-59).

It is around mid-1991 that the music industry begins to realize that rap is no longer a niche market but rather possesses the potential to be highly profitable (Chang 416). Not surprisingly the music industry felt that rap would need to possess the same cross-over potential as Michael Jackson or Lionel Richie. Rap musicians did have wide appeal to white audiences but in crossing-over these artists did not lose their base of black urban fans or their "authentic" black voice (Kitwana, *The Rap on Gangsta Rap* 15-16). Rap music, artists, and producers became and continue to be central to the music industry and its "practices and aesthetics" (Negus

85). Rap musicians have resisted complete co-optation in ways that artists in other genres have not been able to do. Keith Negus explains,

> Often denied direct access, offered licensing deals, lower budgets, poorer contracts or simply cut from the roster when there is a financial crisis, rap has (partly out of necessity) been able to generate alternative resources, and through these the genre has continually reinvented and redefined itself in those spaces and places designated… as 'underground.' That rap musicians have managed continually to redefine style itself while crossing social and cultural barriers, both within the US and beyond, is a process which has occurred despite, rather than because of, the ways in which the recording industry has sought to organize the production of contemporary popular music. (102)

Rap could not be ignored and it also could not be completely appropriated by the corporate music structure. If the music industry succeeded in completely mainstreaming rap music it would cease to exist as rap. Even though there are commercial jingles that sell toys and cereals to children using hip hop beats the genre itself must remain reflective of the urban core that is its foundation.

Technological Advancements

Technology informs not only the creation and production of rap music but also the dissemination of rap music. Recording and musical devices such as the turntable, mixer, vinyl records, synthesizers and digital sampling equipment are central to creating rap music. Some scholars, such as Andrew Bartlett, assert that the art of digital sampling is an African American or African diasporic aesthetic because of the ways that one must select "available media, texts, and contexts for performative use" (393). The African and African American use of oral storytelling, and the orality of these cultures, couples well with these technologies because artists

are able to use technological processes to enhance or provide a piece, or set the tone, for the narrative being told. This is an example of how black cultural authenticity is maintained and constitutes rap music.

The dissemination of rap music at the grassroots level relied heavily on technology. In the 1980s and 1990s the "mix tape" (a collection of various songs by the same or various artists recorded on a cassette tape) becomes an "alternative income" for many artists and producers (Watkins 14). It was a common practice for rap artists to promote themselves and their crew by creating self-made tapes and later compact discs. These recordings would be sold at shows or on street corners. It was the best form of self-promotion because these recordings would be shared among friends. These recordings would also be given to those employed by radio stations and music stores in the hopes of gaining radio play or being heard in a store while someone was shopping for music.

As discussed earlier, in 1991 a new technology, called SoundScan, changed the way that the music industry would track record sales forever. In the early 1990s there is a steep increase in the sale of country and rap music. These spikes could have gone unnoticed, or perhaps the impact of these sales would not have been as accurately captured, if SoundScan were not created. According to Craig Watkins, SoundScan changed the way "pop" music should be defined, because of the high sales records, rap would need to be included, and also, the indie labels producing rap music gained recognition and financial success (39-42).

By the late 1990s rap was greatly impacted by the advent of the internet. Despite raging "digital divide" arguments American youths were "wired." Rap artist, producer, and hip hop pioneer Chuck D is quoted as stating

> There's a lot of misconception out there that the rap and hip hop community isn't online, but the development of the music community has always run parallel to technological advances… This community was the first to embrace emulators and DAT machines in the creation of music. The internet is no different. (Watkins 131-132)

The internet is a forum that is consistent with the hip hop ethos. It is a space where those who are socially isolated have access to modes of creating a personal identity and influencing the social knowledge formation (Holmes Smith 77). Anyone can access the hip hop world and participate in it online by listening to music, reading or posting to blogs, viewing artist and record label webpages, and purchasing hip hop goods.

Consumerism and Capitalist Culture

To understand this context, it is necessary to understand that "rap is a very particular US business" (Negus 83). Through the production and marketing of products hip hop has been central in creating the American "lifestyle" beginning in the mid 1990s (Chang 419). This is so because people in consumer cultures largely have come to believe that they can and must "buy" their identity and exercise their agency via purchases. Arjun Appadurai states that, "the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser" (596). This impulse is supported by, and perhaps desirable to, Americans struggling to define national identity. As we lose faith in our long-held narratives and myths we are given the option to merely purchase a new one. In a country that defines and prides itself on the premise that we are subjects capable of choosing how we wish to live, and exercise our own liberty and happiness, this logic has a lot of traction. Before delving into this further it is necessary to trace the evolution of the commodification of hip hop.

Hip hop is the "ultimate incarnation of spectacularized cultural exchange," an exchange that people have never been so willing to engage in and it ultimately occurs via the purchasing of commodities (Potter 9). One of the reasons that commodified hip hop remains vital and lucrative, after more than two decades, is its ability to "morph" to serve different "masters" in that these commodities give a voice to a wide array of people (George 155). Hip hop artists actually use songs as marketing tools to promote the items and brands that they have a financial stake in (Rose, *Why Hip Hop Matters* 219). Media monopolies are not looking for mere musicians but those artists who are capable of producing a "synergy of goods" and a song could be used as the basis for a movie, videogame, book, or soundtracks; the most successful artists are those that are themselves a brand, with an accompanying lifestyle available for purchase (Chang 447).

Initially, the commodification of hip hop largely occurred through endorsement deals, such as Adidas and Run DMC in the 1980s, or Coolio and Method Man's appearance in a Tommy Hilfiger 1996 catwalk (Negus 100). Rap artists now recognize those connections and run their own successful companies based on their individual brand, producing such items as clothing, fragrances, shoes, books, video games, and even motivational seminars. Beginning in the 1990s there emerges a "formal hip-hop economy" that had strong affiliations with corporate America (Watkins 58). This affiliation between the rap artist, the product, and corporate America is crucial to the popularization of hip hop because, as Nicole Fleetwood explains, "it marks an important transition of the localized cultural practices associated with hip-hop into a growing culture industry" (155). In regards to cultural exchange, not only were non-urban dwellers adapting an urban style, but there begins to be a mixing of the urban style among the wealthy elite. As Fleetwood states, "Through mass customization, the good life symbolically

represented in clothes by [Ralph] Lauren and [Tommy] Hilifiger became attainable to a broader section of consumers" (156). Therefore, not only was hip hop style and culture reaching Americans, but also a bit of the lifestyle associated with high-end brands. This is consistent with the "postmodern moment" where bricolage is common and the blurring of high and low culture the norm. Another result of the commodification of hip hop is that black designers gain recognition on a national scale that would not have been possible without the visibility provided by rap artists. Karl Kani and FUBU clothing and accessories became popular even among white, suburban buyers (Fleetwood 156). By 1998 the hip hop genre outsold every other genre of music in the United States and the clothing lines and other associated products confirmed hip hop's "indelible mark [on] popular culture" (Ogbar 38).

As I stated above, Americans, and others in capitalistic cultures, create an identity via their purchases. The PBS Frontline documentary *The Persuaders* explores how advertisers are using more of a "spiritual" based approach to promoting and selling products, where one is not merely buying a product, but buying an experience or something that is consistent with or reflects their inner-self. Nikolas Rose explains how a series of choices are really what allow one to construct an identity and understand who one is. He conceives humans to be a series of assemblages; individuals are the sum of their "… routines, habits, and techniques within specific domains of action and value…" (38). The idea that one has the ability to create the self through personal choices is consistent with liberal values and resonates with those living in a nation that has a liberal political orientation. There is a tenuous balance that must be maintained in the liberal state where individuals are allowed to govern themselves, but not so much so that any type of behavior is permissible and accepted. Nikolas Rose's notion of assemblages is very useful here in understanding how the balance is maintained. People are presented with a certain

set of choices from which they can "invent themselves" (to use Rose's terms). They can feel empowered, creative, and unique, never realizing that they are not really as free as they are made to feel, since they only had a certain set number of choices to select from. Therefore, individuals in liberal societies are "…linked together not through constraint or injunction, but through regulated acts of choice" (98). This option of choice allows individuals to,

> …reinterpret the mundane elements of everyday life-conduct – shopping, working, cooking – as dimensions of 'life-style choice': activities in *which* [author's emphasis] people invest themselves and *through which* [author's emphasis] they both express and manifest their worth and value as selves. (98)

Globalization

Hip hop is a commodity and a cultural export as well. The interconnected nature of the U.S. with the world market results in hip hop spreading beyond national borders. Hip hop exports began as early as the 1980s thanks to such media as books, films, and even news and media representations (Price III 89). Hip hop also happened to emerge during the global information age, setting it apart from many other musical genres and enabling it to reach audiences previous genres in their early stages could not (Kitwana, *Why White Kids* xii).

There is also an interesting connection between globalization and the conflation of American identity with hip hop identity. Something that becomes popularized and widely consumed by Americans naturally spreads nationally, and then in many cases, internationally. The goods and images that our international neighbors consume create the impression that these American goods are representative of what it means to be an *American*. Nicole Fleetwood cites fashion as one avenue in which black style has become American style, and is so viewed, not

only nationally but internationally (174-175). This is further evidence that hip hop has, to use George Nelson's expression, "funked" the world.

People use hip hop to suit their needs. This is consistent with the precepts of multiculturalism as well as with the core of hip hop's story – rebellion, struggle, survival – that applies to people all over the world. Hip hop is malleable allowing individuals to add their own "flavor" or to appropriate certain aspects that best suit them and their needs. Arjun Appadurai explains how commodities in a global age influence, but is also appropriated by the cultures, which consume them:

> The globalization of culture is not the same as homogenization, but globalization involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization (armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, clothing styles, and the like), which are absorbed into local political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise, fundamentalism, etc. (Appadurai 596)

Fashion Industry

The reach and popularization of hip hop fueled by a global commodity culture provided the fertile ground for the rise of the hip hop moguls. Christopher Holmes Smith explains that it is during the 1990s that the "ensemble of aspiration and practices that constitute hip-hop culture became accepted as common sense elements of the American experience" and the result is "the figure who proved catalytic to this cultural movement, the 'hip hop mogul'" (70). It is now common for young black men who rap, and sometimes produce rap music, to own their record labels and other capitalist ventures (Keyes 174). As fashion lines began to cater to hip hop fans, and the hip hop fashion industry merged with the music industry, the leaders of business in this area are hip hop moguls (Fleetwood 158). Fashion also gave rise to the black designers

mentioned above, creating a whole new space for black entrepreneurship that reached beyond urban communities and generated substantial wealth for the fashion house founders who became the designers "to watch" (Watkins 67-69). There has surely been exploitation of black novices, but the game within the music and corporate industries has changed, and rappers have "learned the ins and outs of the business" and they have gained "both financial rewards and increased creative control" (Potter 111).

The contexts detailed above intersected within the problem-space of contested American identity. This nodal point gave rise to hip hop, its complex nature, and rhetorical force. This musical genre and the Hustler became a cultural phenomenon that propels black America into the domains of culture and economics. As will be demonstrated throughout this project, hip hop produces a sensibility and logic that infuses national identity, and shapes the nation and its practices. This is largely made possible through an augmentation of the Self-Made Man. I now turn to the domain of the economic to explore the production and expression of this sensibility.

Chapter 4: "The Hustler's Use of the Logic of Commensuration and the Emergence of the Improbable Rhetoric of Jay-Z's *Decoded*."

Defining the Hustler via the Logic of Commensuration

To understand the emergence and rhetorical potentiality of hip hop's Self-Made Man, the "hustler," I turn to Lawrence Grossberg's domain of the economic. The constituting logic of this domain is commensuration and it is possible because of translation. As stated in chapter two, what allows for a valuation to occur is that *no translation is necessary*. According to Grossberg, it is only because people understand the meaning or constitution of a thing that a valuation is possible. One has to pause to ask, how is it that the Hustler is a figure, and perhaps instructive case study, of success in twenty-first century America. The Hustler embodies qualities, with the exception of "hood" authenticity, that are consistent with traditional narratives that constitute the Self-Made Man's ethos of hard work, entrepreneurship, vision, and ingenuity. What is different, however, is the way in which knowledge is obtained and paths of success are forged.

The Hustler is a late twentieth century construction. He is an iteration of previous mythic figures but his existence challenges traditional norms and logics particular to the Self-Made Man. It can be argued that in some ways this figure supports the traditional Self-Made Man ideals of individuality, self-sufficiency, a strong work ethic, and ingenuity, but it is the ways in which he challenges the telling of the rags-to-riches story that are rhetorically significant and the focus of this project. The contexts detailed in chapter three describe the conjuncture in which the Hustler was forged. When given a script that seems impossible to follow a new one must be written. The notion that one only has to follow the proper, legal channels to achieve success, because the structure of the United States and its various institutions and systems guarantee the proverbial equal playing field, is revealed to be a lie. To understand the rhetorical savvy and inventiveness

of the Hustler it is necessary to explore his defining characteristics: strong work ethic, business acumen learned and perfected in nontraditional ways, entrepreneurial skill, financial wealth, legitimacy in the corporate world, and a sense of authenticity among urban black Americans.

First and foremost a Hustler has a very strong work ethic, or hustle. This originates in a hunger to survive and succeed in the difficult circumstances presented by ghetto life in America. Not every young man that can rhyme has the ability to rise to the status of the Hustler and that is because it takes someone with a fierce determination. Talent is necessary, but if a young man does not possess the drive and initiative to work much harder than those surrounding him, then that talent will not get him very far.

"Hustlers" not only work harder than almost everyone else but they are also very intelligent and possess a great deal of business acumen. Traditionally someone wishing to pursue corporate success would follow a path of attending college, obtaining a business degree, or something similar, and gaining invaluable experience interning. This path is an unrealistic and, some may argue, unobtainable one for most poor black males. The crack epidemic provided opportunities for young black inner-city males that seemed far more appealing than attending a poorly run, poorly funded public school, or working for minimum wage at a job with little room for advancement. Given the hopeless outlook that the academic path provides, and often faced with the realities of poverty, the Hustler finds the drug-trade to be the most viable choice available to him. The Hustler takes the work seriously and looks to advance beyond being a seller and move into the position of a distributor. The underground economy teaches them basic business principles that are not so different from concepts that work well and produce results in the corporate world. There is a myth that hip hop culture is purely engaged in a *nouveau riche* mindset that is premised on a "bling" lifestyle. This is not so for the Hustler. While many

moguls enjoy expensive, luxury items, many do not spend frivolously with little regard for financial planning. Basic business principles, such as supply and demand, hours put in correlating with financial and personal gains, and understanding how strategic investments can produce profits, are all learned on the streets and translate quite well in the legitimate business world.

Given the strong work ethic and the business acumen of the Hustler, it is not surprising they would also possess great entrepreneurial skill. This skill is what allows them to gain success in the underground economy but it is also what helps them escape it. The Hustler uses his musical talent to create a bevy of other business opportunities. This is the way that these men obtain true wealth. Financial success is an attribute of the Hustler that goes hand and hand with their entrepreneurial drive. These men are not merely comfortable financially, but rather, build empires in the truest sense of the word, as is evidenced by their appearing in top financial magazines, such as *Forbes,* where they are listed as some of the most successful men in American business.

The two qualities of the Hustler that are contradictory, are that they are viewed as legitimate magnates in various areas of business and commerce, but also as authentically black, or some may say "hood," to a particular portion of black America. It seems like quite the rhetorical feat to fashion a persona that allows one to be authorized as belonging when among a group of wealthy elite white men, and also when with poor, black men. It seems as though the worlds could not be further apart or require more different credentials for acceptance. It is, however, just the managing of these two facets of the Hustler persona, which makes them successful, and indeed subjects employing a more improbable mode of rhetoric. This figure also ultimately reconfigures national identity by transversing and occupying two subject positions –

an individual from the poor, urban ghetto and a millionaire mogul – that are not only at odds with one another but also at odds with how we understand the ideal citizen subject.

The next valuation that the Hustler produces is a commensurate translation as legitimate businessmen. If being a millionaire makes it difficult to be seen as part of a community that struggles financially, it is equally, if not more difficult, to belong to a club of millionaires when you differ from them in ways that span historical and cultural boundaries. Typically when a black man strives to be a successful business man in the United States he is faced with choices that often force him to tone down his difference – whatever it is that makes him identifiably black by white middle-class America. Many black men find themselves faced with managing an impossible binary. As Trey Ellis explains,

> Increasingly, America seems to be painting us into two corners. In one, we're the monsters they've always said we were. In the other corner, we're fine but all those other black men are monsters; we are anointed honorary whites so long as we abandon every trace of our ethnicity. (10)

Typically to obtain the fortune and legitimacy in the business world that the Hustler has achieved it would be required that he take traditional paths to success. This path often includes not only abandoning "every trace of [his] ethnicity" but also attending college and earning a business degree. The Hustler refuses this path or the opportunities were not given to him. As Reeves states the "hustler's", "…motivation for his criminally enterprising ways was disillusionment with the American economic system, with the axiom that the road to wealth is hard, legal labor" (206).

Through the logic of commensuration the Hustler is able to take the business acumen he learned while hustling and translate it into mainstream, legal business sense. Skold and Rhen explain,

> Hear any rappers talk about industry success, business acumen, and entrepreneurial skill sets, and they'll most probably follow it up by telling you that they learned their ways on the street, just hustlin' or engaging in an outright criminal lifestyle, in short, by leading their lives in hard-core urban reality. (60)

For the Hustler it is simply all related to his work ethic; he is a hustler forever. What we witness in the Hustler is an individual with a life that sets him up for failure, and yet, he succeeds in spite of it all. Structural forces prevent him entering the "proper" channels for obtaining success so he merely uses what he learned as a hustler to get ahead. This is the logic of commensuration at work, providing the condition for his success within the embedded/disembedded domain of the economic. Hustling becomes his Harvard MBA because in this case the same results are produced. Indeed organizational communication scholars Skold and Rehn argue that the Hustler should be read as an "alternative" understanding of entrepreneurship, and that by studying his success one can "illustrate how the study of organizations could be extended beyond the boundaries of the safe and well known, even into 'the hood' and onto the streets" (53).

Rap is also a training ground for success and competition in the capitalist system as he adapts the "battle" mentality to transition from dominating in his neighborhood to dominating in national and international record sales. Keith Negus summarizes it best,

> Street intelligence is about 'knowing markets' and 'knowing consumers' and, like street marketing, it involves employing conventional business management techniques based on monitoring, data gathering, and accumulation. Yet these conventional marketing

practices and business activities are elided through the discourse of street, denying that it

is similar to the other activities that are daily being conducted and initiated from the

corporate suite. (99-100)

One of the most surprising ways the Hustler demonstrates the logic of commensuration is

how he masterfully equates, and arguably conflates, black culture with American culture. He

does this in a way that presents the black American experience as always having been an

American experience, just one that has been overlooked and informed by racism. Black culture,

via hip hop, acquires a new valuation where it is equal, if not synonymous with, American

culture. Simply put, hip hop is American, America is hip hop.

Rap music presents its listeners with a different tale of America. As the narrative of

"hood life" in America has progressed over the years listeners have entered a world where

teenagers are more preoccupied with surviving the violence of their streets and bringing in

money to help pay the bills than attending prom and high school football games. As these

"stories" become popularized and circulated via popular culture the ghetto experience becomes

an American experience. It is an American story because it is happening in America, to a large

portion of American citizens, and it was unknown because until the popularization of rap it was

largely invisible. Hip hop and its consumption by a wide spectrum of America made it visible

and forced people to incorporate it into the American landscape.

There is an increasing acceptance of various forms of art and the blurring of "high" and

"low" culture in the twentieth and twentieth-first century in America.   There is a flourishing of

what could be considered "low" art forms that take the form of poetry, music, dance, and

painting. These art forms inspire "high" art and couture fashion houses. Hip hop as a cultural art

form that is American, not merely urban, is reinforced by its export and circulation in our global economy and social-cultural networks.

Another way that the Hustler illustrates the commensuration between hip hop and American culture is strongly related to his recasting of the American dream. There is this interesting tension in many rap lyrics where the Hustler seems to be simultaneously informed by, and embodying traditional American narratives, and also railing against them. Values such as hard work, commitment, bravery, moxie, individuality, a desire to self-govern, and a capitalist drive are all common themes shared by many rap artists. Rhetorically the Hustler simultaneously reconfigures and reaffirms American identity.

But at the same time the Hustler in some ways unabashedly criticizes America. The Hustler demonstrates that the structural forces that constitute the United States are complex and rife with inconsistencies and loop holes. He in some ways contradicts himself and his persona when pointing out these inconsistencies. He is a capitalist entrepreneur but yet he is not afraid to critique the system that made him wealthy and gave him the life he always desired. He has been accepted in the "halls of American high society" and yet is not afraid to jeopardize his "sweetheart" status by pointing out the ways in which many American policies and logics are inherently racist and classist.

Imani Perry uses the term "thug mimicry" to explain how embodying and embracing the figure of the thug actually serves as a source of power. Unlike Homi Bhabha's mimicry, where one will subvert the privilege and power created by essentialist postulates, thug mimicry "dislocates the authority for defining the black underworld and manipulating negative images of black America in order to serve the interests of white America" (109). In mirroring the

stereotypical thug, the rap artist gives a voice to this figure and in doing so indicts white centrality by detailing the social conditions that led to this person becoming a thug. It is not a voice of the mainstream explaining the actions of a thug, but rather the thug himself, and this grants him an "authority to explain their actions, and they generally do not attribute them to deficient culture or inherited racial flaws, but to hunger and lousy schools, and tragic formative experiences" (Perry 109).

Despite the tenuous relationship the Hustler may have with America he still possesses the entrepreneurial drive to succeed. Despite feeling discarded by America, urban Americans are still American. The Self-Made Man's ethos that penetrates hip hop uses the capitalist spirit to thrive. Being in America and given our capitalist ethos, the perfect conditions exist to give rise to the hustler and the birth of rap is made possible. But hip hop can be so easily villainized without considering that hustling and hip hop often represent ways of making money that shares more similarities with many corporate American practices than many would be comfortable confronting. Hip hop produces only a fraction of the wealth made by other businesses that have arguably been far more harmful to society.

As the United States faces economic instability some Americans lose faith in the nation regarding the economy and the ability to earn a living wage. This contributes to the commensuration between "hustler' and American. The more Americans in general struggle to survive, the more closely they can identify with the struggle of the Hustler. It is no longer merely the generationally poor individuals who are struggling during these hard economic times, but also individuals who at one time possessed financial security, and for some sizable disposable incomes. People who were able to take comfort in the fact that hard work pays off are being forced to see some of the harsh realities that generations of urban, black Americans

have always known. The result is that our long-held cherished narrative of the bootstrap myth can become compromised. In this moment of uncertainty, the narrative has to be recast and told in a way that is more consistent with the new understanding of how success becomes obtainable in the U.S. It is a moment such as this that the Hustler can replace the conventional Self-Made Man. A new figure must emerge because the new logic cannot sustain the old; the old logic does not provide the inspiration and narrative that the nation desires and needs. The valuation of Hustler as the American entrepreneurial success story, and the facialization of that figure, creates a shift in how we can imagine American identity. American identity and ethos becomes embodied by a figure that is a black male who used illegal channels to pave the way to his success. Traditional qualities such as hard work and the ability to speak freely are maintained, and indeed serve, as saving grace when other promises, such as equal rights and opportunities, are revealed to be limited, if not an outright falsehood.

The new figuration of American identity in the form of the Hustler is also possible because the many Americans have a sense of searching for an identity. Again, as many of the old myths and narratives lose their traction and legitimacy, it is natural that people would seek, and be open to, a reimagining of American identity. Because of hip hop's mass appeal and popularity the Hustler provides the perfect entry-point in the national imagination. At its core rap is about life, and the desires and struggles we all face in life. The "hustler's" story is arguably then *everyone's* story.

This idea of sharing a story is a powerful one. Hip hop narratives are now something more than the latest cycle in youth culture. The value and influence of hip hop culture is so great that to many it is now synonymous with America. Hip hop has become multicultural, and this cultural exchange demonstrates commensuration, and therefore, can create the sense of one

larger American culture. "Hip hop is a subculture of American music, of American culture, and of black America. And as much as it resists the philosophical and aesthetic pressure of mainstream America, it finds itself in constant conversation with, responding to, and part of Americana" (Perry 194). When considering the fact that various audiences consume the music and characters of hip hop they are indeed becoming hip hop. Thereby a transmission of a particular worldview, grounded in a particular marginalized subject position, occurs. An ethos accompanies that character and that ethos then becomes, to a certain degree, an American ethos. Rap, and the stories of rap, become part of the American landscape.

A new American hero, and new Self-Made Man, emerges from the hip hop formation. In the "hustler's" account of the urban ghetto Americans are forced to acknowledge and incorporate this landscape into the American experience, a landscape where cipher circles[2] are just as common as baseball games and where sixteen year olds are stressed over growing their drug empires rather than studying for the SAT's. We witness how the very structure of America makes the Hustler a twenty-first century cultural trope. He is forged in the structural oppression that leaves him few choices and is fueled by American mythos and values.

The valuations generated by the Hustler are possible because of the shifts in cultural logics that are the result of the contextual forces detailed in the conjunctural analysis in chapter two. What is of rhetorical significance in the production of value and the notion of translation? Valuation does not require translation because for the assessment to occur individuals understand what they are comparing to assign value. The Hustler is a figure who has been years in the making and he is known by America because of the various intersecting contexts I detail in the

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[2] Cipher circles form when a group of people stand in a circle taking turns sharing rap lyrics they have written.

conjunctural analysis. How the Hustler is commensurate with the Self-Made Man, the American dream, the legitimate businessman, and American identity is only understood via the conjuncture. Without understanding how the various events, circumstances, and contexts surround and create the terrain for the hustler, his translatability would be unclear, his rhetorical efficacy not fully understood.

The Hustler as the New Incarnation of the Self-Made Man: A Thematic Analysis of Jay-Z's *Decoded*.

Decoded is very unconventional in form and structure, while also violating many conventions of the autobiography. One typically expects an autobiography to follow a chronological order and to focus on the person telling the story. Also, there is customarily a group of photos in the center of the text showing the subject, the important people in his or her life, and pictures of formative life events that play a large part in the autobiographer's tale. Jay-Z follows none of these conventions. The book does not follow a chronological order, but is rather arranged thematically, and he jumps around the years of his life in a way that serves the purpose of addressing the theme. The book centers on the decoding of the lyrics of his songs. This choice was made because according to Jay-Z, "My last will and testimony is the work. It's imperfect, but there's no truer statement of who I am. The reason this book is ultimately about my lyrics, instead of being a typical autobiography, is that my creative work is my truest legacy, for better or worse" (305). *Decoded* is a meta-text because Jay-Z not only "decodes" his song lyrics by explaining their rhetorical function, he also explains how these lyrics work to construct his rap persona. Another way in which Jay-Z breaks with convention is that the text is not that of a typical book. He uses various fonts and font colors. He overlays written text with various images, and positions the written word around different pictures and drawings. Some pages

feature images that do not contain any explanatory caption or accompaniment of written text, but rather, require the reader to do the work of connecting the image to the theme and message of the section. The format of the text engages the reader, requires participation on their part, and creates a sense that the reader and Jay-Z are working together to generate meaning from the pages. Finally, this autobiography is also partly the biography of hip hop, and breaks with the convention of a subject-centered text. As Jay-Z discusses his life it seems that references to hip hop are inescapable, as though he cannot talk about one without mentioning the other. Jay-Z's interpretation of the history of rap is arguably consistent with other prominent rap artists' views. This is evidenced by other artists' song lyrics, and also Jay-Z's citing of other rap artists and industry leaders throughout *Decoded*.

The conjuncture of hip hop produced the conditions for the emergence of the improbable. In what follows I will examine an improbable text that is possible because of the rise and influence of hip hop. This thematic analysis is a demonstration of this improbable rhetoric at work. Jay-Z is an exemplar Hustler whose autobiography, *Decoded*, demonstrates not only the importance and influence of hip hop, but also asserts that the Hustler is the new incarnation of the Self-Made Man. The text is improbable in content and structure. The book seeks to justify an assertion, that the Hustler is the new incarnation of the Self-Made Man, that contradicts American laws, notions of common sense, stereotypes of young black males, and conceptions of hip hop as a cultural and art form. The American success story has historically functioned to reinforce American values and norms, particularly when that story is one of a minority. This text breaks with the expectations and predictable storyline of the "token" rags to riches success story.

Jay-Z is making the argument in his autobiography that the Hustler is the incarnation of the American dream and the Self-Made Man in the twenty-first century. He forces readers to

acknowledge that the "hustler's" path to success is indeed consistent with long held American understandings of success. One may attempt to make or sustain a disassociation between black, urban America and American; the black urban American is often presented as an Other. Jay-Z disallows this separation by illustrating that his story is a variation of American ideals, not an aberration. There are four primary lines of argument Jay-Z employs to support this position. First, he demonstrates that American systems and institutions have historically created the conditions of poverty and crime in urban, black America and by extension strongly prevent the success of young, black men. Secondly, he claims that because of the challenges and inequalities that limited him, he actually embodies American ideals and virtues more so than those who are not disadvantaged by the system. Third, Jay-Z gives his claims legitimacy by demonstrating that rap is an art form classifiable as poetry and comparable to literature. And finally, Jay-Z enhances his assertion with visual imagery, making them more compelling.

Delegitimizing American Systems and Institutions

*"*Because America, as I understood the concept, hated my black ass" (Jay-Z 154).

Jay-Z has the difficult task of convincing his readers that he, and other young men in his situation, are in some sense justified in choosing an illegal path to success. This first step is necessary as a rhetor because if the audience cannot be convinced of this then the remaining claims can be easily dismissed. Throughout the text Jay-Z demonstrates the ways he was made to feel like a contemptible, second-class citizen.

In the American ghetto children are aware of the government at a very young age. The presence and perception of the government is not a positive one.

We got to know all kinds of government agencies not because of civic classes, but because they actually visit our houses and sit up on our couches asking questions. From the time we're small children we go to crumbling public schools that tell us all we need to know about what the government thinks of us. (154)

Jay-Z establishes the ways that urban, black Americans are made to feel separate, policed, and disparaged by legal and government agencies, "But even when we could shake off the full weight of those imposing buildings and try to just live, the truth of our lives and struggle was still invisible to the larger country. The rest of the country was free of any obligation to claim us" (155). Barriers to equal participation and opportunity begin at birth and hardly allows for a level playing field.

Another example of how Jay-Z delegitimizes U.S. government and institutions is in the detailing of the ways these bodies have contributed to the crime and poverty in urban America.

The deeper causes of the crack explosion were in policies concocted by a government that was hostile to us, almost genocidally hostile when you think about how they aided or tolerated the unleashing of guns and drugs on poor communities, while at the same time cutting back on schools, housing, and assistance programs. And to top it all off, they threw in the so-called war on drugs, which was really a war on us. (158)

In decoding the song "Blue Magic" he directly attributes the crack epidemic to the Reagan administration, "Push (push) money over boards, you got it" is meant to express "how Reagan and Ollie North were hypocritically working hand-in-hand with hustlers to move drugs" (198-199).

If Jay-Z's readers lack more contemporary proof of the maltreatment of poor, black America they only need to recall the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. *"This can't be happening*

in a wealthy country. Why isn't anyone doing anything? … Katrina felt like something that was happening to black people, specifically" (Jay-Z 219). Jay-Z contrasts the government's and America's reaction to Katrina with responses to other natural disasters. When hurricanes or tornados destroy the lives of predominantly white populations "we process that sort of thing as a tragedy. When it happens to black people, it feels like something else, like history rerunning its favorite loop" (219). Katrina was not just a reflection of how America did not value black people but also how charity reinforces the systemic values and beliefs that contribute to the perpetuation of poverty in this country, "To some degree charity is a racket in a capitalist system, a way of making our obligations to one another optional, and of keeping poor people feeling a sense of indebtedness to the rich, even if the rich spend every day exploiting those same people" (220-221)

The response to Katrina also illustrates how America tends to think about the black and poor in America. The song "Minority Report" takes Katrina as a way to also make a larger statement on the conditions of poverty in America and the kinds of choices one is forced to make when living in those conditions:

> I wanted to do a song about Katrina, but I also wanted the song to be about how what we saw during the hurricane was just an extreme example of the shit that was already happening in New Orleans. The young guys there were motivated by the same desperation as the guy who loots the store after the hurricane for diapers and formula. Both are just trying to survive the storm. If you focus only on the criminal act and lose sight of the whole chain of cause and effect, you get a distorted, unfair picture. People are often pushed into desperate acts and bad choices by circumstances. (225)

Jay-Z comes around to asserting that the system is so set against him, and people like him, that the mere telling of their story flies in the face of America: "America did not want to talk about the human damage or the deeper causes of carnage. But then here came rap, like the American nightmare come to life" (158). Rap forced Americans to face the portion of the populace it had comfortably been able to ignore:

> This is one of things that makes me – all serious rappers – renegades: When we report the news, it doesn't sound the same as when you hear it from CNN. Most of us come from communities where people were just supposed to stay in their corners quietly, live and die without disturbing the master narrative of American society. Simply speaking our truths, which flew in the face of the American myth, made us rebels. (105)

These songs gave a voice to those who did not have one before: "The narrator is caught up in a crazy system, one that treats addicts like criminals and forces many young and ambitious into a life that might end with him shot up or locked up" (35).

This "giving voice" ultimately leads to the validation of one's experiences, or causes the uncomfortable confrontation with the history and realities of America that get omitted or silenced. When decoding "Hell Yeah (Pimp the System)" Jay-Z's line "I'm only trying to eat what you snacking on" addresses the historical travesties and criminality of many high-profile American corporations. Jay-Z states in his footnote for this line,

> Hip hop and hustling both represent ways of making money that pale in comparison to the crooked history of American power and wealth. What rappers and hustlers have made is a fraction of the real wealth generated by so-called legitimate businesses that have been a thousand times more harmful to society. Behind every great fortune, they

say, is a great crime. Our fortunes – and our crimes – are not even in the same league as

the real wealth in this country. (187)

If the reader is now convinced of the disparity in treatment and opportunity of black, urban

youth, coupled with the failings and criminality of U.S. systems and institutions, it starts to

become easier to accept that the Hustler possesses very different options and paths to the

American dream than they might, and, that the Hustler has a different, but no less American, way

of achieving success.

Embodiment of American Ideals

The Self-Made Man, as I have stated, is one of America's most foundational and

treasured national figures. Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America* asserts that this construction

is central to our understandings and expectations of masculinity in America. This construction is

one that has been difficult for many blacks in America to embody. Jay-Z details the challenges

and impediments to legitimate success in America for him and other young black men from his

neighborhood. What Jay-Z is describing is really a lack of "thick" rights – recall this is what

Kymlicka and Norman define as practical or practicable rights. When placed in the environment

discussed above one would think that the last thing Jay-Z would, or would want to do, is applaud

and demonstrate American values and ideals. Jay-Z effectively persuades readers that hustling

was not only his most viable option, but also that it is because of his American values and ideals

that he pursues the kind of path to success that he does.

In *Decoded* Jay-Z provides readers with a story of America that is not often told or

idealized. He recounts his youth spent in cipher circles, where high school aged boys are more

interested in growing their drug empires than in sports or preparing college applications. By

giving his readers a view into this world he allows them to understand how a life of hustling

becomes one's best option, and to also understand that these boys are not driven by moral corruption or laziness.

Several times in the book Jay-Z refers to hustling and rap as a new frontier, where he and other rappers are "staking out new territory where we could run things ourselves" (246). Another common self-made metaphor Jay-Z uses is referring to making his way into the rap industry as "striking gold" (255). In his song "American Dreamin'" a line states, "Ain't nothing wrong with aim, just gotta change the target" (32). Jay-Z implies in this line that his and other young urban men's aspirations are very similar to those of other Americans; "Our aim is the same as everyone, shooting for the American dream of success and wealth, but the target is a little different: Instead of trying to land in college or a in a good job, I'm trying to get rich in the streets" (33). Given his surroundings in an American ghetto he was exposed to very different representations of success,

> Where I'm from, that guy in the shining Benz was almost always a hustler, not a doctor
> or a lawyer or an engineer. Seeing that level of success is powerful… it gave us all a
> kind of hunger for success that motivated us to do something more than just hold down
> the project benches. (285)

He tries to convince his readers to view young hustlers as young American men dreaming of being successful one day. "To me, there's something moving about a kid who goes to sleep dreaming about plans to make money, wakes up early with a Colgate smile, buries his work in the dirt, and fills his small pocket with crack rocks (pockets full of hope, I call them in 'Renegade')" (35). Here Jay-Z tries to replace the image of a violent thug with that of a kid who is somewhere near manhood, dreaming of a better life. These kinds of characterizations make young hustlers something more than mere killing machines. Jay-Z acknowledges that crack is

"contraband to the law and poisonous salvation to the crackhead, but to the hustler, it's a way out" (105). He also stresses to readers that selling crack is not an easy decision that one arrives at and the life is difficult and dangerous, but young hustlers "do it for the possibility that one day someone will pick you as the one to step up to the next level" (47).

If readers still find themselves doubtful Jay-Z presents the alternatives a young man in the ghetto faces. This forces the reader to ponder what option they would take.

> The first defense of a lot of people who take the criminal route is that they had no choice, which is almost true: Most of us had choices, but the choices were bleak. The street life was tough and morally compromised and sometimes ugly, but a dead-end nine-to-five job at permanent entry-level wasn't all that attractive, either. The righteous seed in the hustler's mentality was this: He wanted something more for himself. (51)

Jay-Z states several times throughout *Decoded* that the most obvious legitimate job available to him, or others in the Marcy projects, was a job at McDonald's. This is a job that is not believed to possess much potential for advancement: "The kid in McDonald's get a check and that's it. There's no dream in fast food. Manager? That's a promotion, not a dream" (75). Taking a legitimate job was also considered a weak move that could cost a young man his pride and sense of self-worth, since "it seemed like an act of surrender to a world that hated us. I never even considered it a possibility" (75).

Another way that *Decoded* challenges common understandings of the decision to be a hustler is by detailing the qualities that are prized by America that he must embody to succeed. First and foremost, the hustler is a hard worker. Jay-Z details the ways in which he worked hard at hustling and he also worked extremely hard at perfecting the art of rapping. After his exposure to his first cipher circle he became consumed with perfecting his rhyming skills, "I was

good at battling and I practiced it like a sport. I'd spend free time reading the dictionary, building my vocabulary for battles" (7). Jay-Z also stressed the importance of discipline, dispelling the idea that rap artists have no work ethic. He compares the way he prepares for music tours to great athletes training for and playing during an athletic season. Comparing his work ethic to that of Michael Jordan he asserts that this kind of dedication produces consistency and it's "the kind of consistency that you can get only by adding dead-serious discipline to whatever talent you have" (143).

Jay-Z describes himself as possessing the same level of discipline when hustling. He viewed it as a business and conducted himself as a young ingénue looking to get promoted quickly. His mentor when he began hustling had a similar ethos, "I remember Dee Dee talking to us in a professional tone, taking his time so we'd really understand him. He explained that hustling was a business but it also had certain obvious, inherent risks, so we had to be disciplined" (15). It is not uncommon for hustlers to work up to sixty hours straight (Jay-Z 74). This kind of dedication can be attributed to the high stakes of this career. "You learn to compete hard, even when you lose, because you can't settle for second-best as a hustler. It's not worth it. There's no pension and benefits…you might get killed. The only reason to do it is for the top slot" (75).

The natural complement to discipline in America is competition. America is a culture that is very self-driven, where the focus is ultimately on the individual. Jay-Z embodies the quality of a competitive nature as a hustler, rapper, and successful mogul. According to Jay-Z his competitive nature fueled his success in all three domains. Indeed, hustling in many ways was the best training to enter the music business and other industries. As Jay-Z explains, one can "learn something special from playing the most difficult games, the games where winning is

close to impossible and losing is catastrophic: You learn to compete as if your life depended on it. That's the lesson I brought with me to the so-called 'legitimate' world" (79).

Jay-Z argues that the one reason that rap became successful as a genre of music was because of the fact that the artists were naturally competitive. Rap battles are for many the necessary training ground to perfect their craft and to gain exposure. Also, many rap artists have hustled at some point in their life. These two factors make rap artists work hard and hunger for success in ways that other musicians may not.

> Battling in hip hop took the very real competitive energies on the street – the kind of thing that could end in some real life-and-death shit – and transformed them into art. That competitive spirit that we learned growing up in the streets was never just for play and theater. It was real. That desire to compete – and to win – was the engine of everything we did. And we learned how to compete the hard way. (71)

Jay-Z asserts that this competitive energy produces large profits for musicians and record labels, "Sales battles are a hip-hop phenomenon that you just don't see played out in the same explicit public way in other genres of music" (70). This competitive spirit is ever present in hip hop culture and constantly taunts a rap artist to be the one on top.

Jay-Z, as well as his fellow hustlers and rap artists, possess the qualities essential to being a Self-Made Man: strong work ethic, competitive nature, risk-taking, creativity, and dreaming. These men have the vision, moxie, and dedication to achieve success. These qualities are coupled with the added incentive to build their own empires. Jay-Z is clear that the legitimate world offered him few opportunities, so if it were not for the skills and abilities developed while hustling, he never would have had the ability to establish Roc-A-Fella records. He learned that once he had some moderate success as an artist he would still be shunned for being black in

America. Jay-Z, and other hustlers, decided that if the gate keepers would not let them play their game that they would have to create a whole new one.

Many hustlers in Jay-Z's neighborhood were suspicious of the idea of pursuing a record deal. "'These rappers are hoes,' was the general response. 'They just record, tour, and get separated from their families, while some white person takes all their money'" (76). Jay-Z initially becomes disillusioned with the music industry watching the rise and quick decline of his close friend, Jaz's career, "'This business sucks.' No honor, no integrity; it was disgusting. In some ways it was worse than the streets. Jaz's debut album, something he'd been dreaming about his whole life, did come out, but in the end it was nothing more than a tax write-off for a giant corporation" (78). This reality, that the music industry was so similar to a world Jay-Z knew too well, where black Americans are exploited and viewed as disposable, resulted in him giving himself an ultimatum: either he was going to sign himself at his own record label or no one would. He and his partners lacked a formal education but they did possess a hustler's education, a hustler's ethos, and they had a business plan.

Jay-Z describes himself as having a real capitalist drive as he turns obstacles into opportunities and prizes the making of profit with no apologies. One example he gives of how he made an obstacle work to his advantage occurred early in his career. While performing early in his career he wore the men's knitwear line Iceberg. He tells how he started noticing at shows that increasingly more fans were also donning the same garb. Jay-Z pursued an endorsement deal with Iceberg and was coolly rebuffed by the designer. This did not deter Jay-Z, but rather, he made his first move to expand his dealings beyond the music industry. "I'm lucky that Iceberg didn't give us the bullshit we asked for in the first place, an endorsement contract that would've run out a long time ago, because we might not have ever started a company that's poised to bring

in a billion dollars a year in revenue" (83). He defends himself against charges of selling out by stating that he does not see any contradictions between creating art and making money; he dismisses the game people can play with artists "that to be real, to be authentic, you have to hate having money or that success has to feel like such a burden you want to kill yourself. But whoever said that artists shouldn't pay attention to their business was probably someone with their hand in some artist's pocket" (131).

Jay-Z proposes that ultimately, what his success as an entrepreneur gives him is what America often denied him, his freedom. The desire for and sense of entitlement to freedom has historically been something that citizens are willing to fight for and work to achieve. Jay-Z argues that he finds a way to create pathways to freedom for himself via his success. Through the claiming of a piece of the "new frontier" of rap Jay-Z creates the conditions he desires for his career and life: "I'm also lucky never to have needed the approval of the gatekeepers in the industry because from the start we came into the game as entrepreneurs. That gave me the freedom to just be myself, which is the secret to any long-term success…I'm trying to rewrite the old script…" (95). Jay-Z identifies his and other hip hop moguls' goal in the business world as to "take what we've learned about the world from our lives – and what we've learned about integrity and success and fairness and competition – and use it to remake the corporate world" (133). He states that he never had the desire to fit the corporate mold but to "take it over and remake the world in our image" (133). This sentiment, and his valuing of American ideals, are expressed in his song, "Can I Live?" In it there is a line, "I'd rather die enormous than live dormant" and this line, according to Jay-Z,

> resonates deeply with my listeners. It's a take on the "Live Free or Die Trying," "Liberty
> or Death" spirit that's woven into the fabric of what it means to be American. But it's

also about great ambition, and the alternative, which is stagnation. The risk is death, so the reward should have equal gravity, a life lived to the fullest" (107).

Jay-Z clearly demonstrates to his readers that his story is the twenty-first century incarnation of the American dream success story. When faced with systemic and institutional inequities that prohibit the exercising of "thick" rights Jay-Z and other hustlers had to forge another pathway to success. Indeed it is because of Jay-Z's embodiment of American ideals and virtues that he pushes himself to succeed by any means necessary. Now, as one of the most successful moguls in America, he presents himself as still desiring to overcome new challenges, and it is not greed that fuels him but that strong, innate sense of competition that has not left him.

And sometimes, I'm only competing with myself, to be a better artist and businessman. To be a better person with a broader vision. But it's still that old sense of competition that motivates me. I'm still that nigga on the corner seven nights straight, trying to get back the money I lost. I'm still the kid who'd fight to be able to walk through a park in Trenton, the MC who'd battle anyone in a project of a courtyard or back room. This is what the streets have done for us, for me: They've given us our drive; they've made us stronger. Through hip-hop we found a way to redeem those lessons, and use them to change the world. (87)

Creating Legitimacy for Hip Hop

"The problem isn't in the rap or the rapper or the culture. The problem is that so many people don't even know how to listen to the music" (Jay-Z 54).

The line of argument I now consider is how Jay-Z makes the claim that rap music is an art form, and is worthy of being considered and evaluated as such, in order to provide a sense of legitimacy to rap music, *Decoded,* and the black American experience. He not only forces

readers to engage a story of America that rarely gets told, or gets told in a way that reifies stereotypes of black America, but to also view that story as one that should be part of America's narrative landscape. In what follows I will discuss the rhetorical moves used by Jay-Z to establish the legitimacy of rap music as a true art form.

Frequently throughout *Decoded* references are made to poetic and literary devices to explain his and other artists' lyrics. One example of this is when he discusses one of the "most familiar subjects in the history of rap – why I'm dope." To be "dope" is to be exceptional, the best. This is the premise of many rap songs and the great majority of rap battles. He likens songs that address this subject to a sonnet,

> Sonnets have a set structure, but also a limited subject matter: They are mostly about love. Taking on such a familiar subject and writing about it in a set structure forced sonnet writers to find every nook and cranny in a subject and challenged them to invent new language for saying old things. It's the same with braggadocio in rap. (26)

Jay-Z goes on to explain that the songs centering on this subject also demonstrate metaphor and rhythmic language,

> ….frame it within the sixteen-bar structure of a rap verse, synced to specific rhythm and feel of the track… It's like a metaphor for itself; if you can say how dope you are in a completely original, clever, powerful way, the rhyme itself becomes proof of the boast's truth. And there are always deep layers of meaning buried in the simplest verse" (26).

Speaking to the last point made above, Jay-Z cautions listeners to never oversimplify rap music, because the message is rarely simple. Even when it is explicated, one would not be able to conclude that the message is indeed very simple and straight forward, since the lyricist is doing something more with the language beyond the literal meaning. "Hip hop tracks have

traditionally been heavy on the beats, light on melody" where MCs turn "their words into percussion…The words themselves don't mean much, but he snaps those clipped syllables out like drumbeats, *bap bap bapbap"* and the "points of those bars is to bang out a rhythmic idea, not to impress you with the literal meaning of the words" (54). Even when the meaning seems fairly straight forward, Jay-Z urges the listener to push past their initial interpretation to sift through the layers of meaning: "The art of rap is deceptive. It seems so straightforward and personal and real that people read it completely literally, as raw testimony or autobiography" (55). And when someone just focuses on the words or messages that seem controversial they can feel "vindicated in their narrow conception of what the music is about. But that would be like listening to Maya Angelou and ignoring everything until you heard her drop a line about drinking or sleeping with someone's husband and then dismissing her as an alcoholic adulterer" (55).

Jay-Z's explanation of the song "99 Problems" is a good example of how rap songs are often oversimplified or misinterpreted and the larger point is missed. The chorus of this song is "I've got 99 problems, but a bitch ain't one." Many people have referenced this song to jump to the conclusion that Jay-Z is disparaging women. If one listens to the song closely they will realize that this does not quite make sense given the rest of the lyrics of the song. What Jay-Z is actually referring to is a dog, a literal bitch. He explains that the idea for this song came to him when recalling his drive from New Jersey to New York. He was transporting a large amount of drugs. When pulled over by the police on the highway all he could think was that he would be fine if the police did not have a member of the K-9 unit, a drug detecting dog. He admits that he playfully chose those words to poke fun at critics and political pundits who often misrepresent him and his lyrics without doing the work necessary to truly access them and their meaning.

Another way in which Jay-Z gives rap legitimacy is by discussing how these songs are highly inventive and creative. "Poets and hustlers play with language, because for them simple clarity can mean failure" (56). Clarity is obscured by "bend[ing] language, improvis[ing], and invent[ing] new ways of speaking truth" (56). Jay-Z asserts that this can also be enjoyable for the listeners, "And it makes it all the more gratifying to the listener when they finally catch up. Turning something as common as language into a puzzle makes the familiar feel strange; it makes language we take for granted feel fresh and exciting again…" (56).

Rap, like other great literary art forms, confronts and helps an audience process complicated societal issues. Jay-Z presents himself as desiring to create more than club hits or music that glorified the hustler lifestyle. These types of songs sell, but he states there is a dishonesty of rap about "hood life" that does not tell the full story of the young hustler.

> Hip hop had described poverty in the ghetto and painted pictures of violence and thug life, but I was interested in something a little different: the interior space of a young kid's head, his psychology… To tell the story of the kid with the gun without telling the story of why he has it is to tell a kind of lie. To tell the story of pain without telling the story of rewards – the money, the girls, the excitement – is a different kind of evasion. (17)

To further extend this point, Jay-Z discusses how ultimately what makes rap a true art form is that it tells the story of humanity. Even though rap music tells stories that are deeply personal and autobiographical, they still speak to larger themes such as struggle, ambition, frustration, anger, and joy. According to Jay-Z, hip hip hop at this point is "a tool that can be used to find the truth in anything… What's the meaning? What's the meaning of life? That's the question rap was built on from the beginning and, through a million different paths, that's still it ultimate subject" (256).

Finally, like all good literary texts, rap consists of characters that people feel a sense of identification with. Shawn Carter creates the character Jay-Z. All rappers do this, "Rappers refer to themselves a lot. What the rapper is doing is creating a character, that if you're lucky, you find out about more and more from song to song. The rapper's character is essentially a conceit, a first-person literary creation…It's like wearing a mask" (292). Jay-Z says these characters, like all great book or movie characters, "get inside us, we care about them, love them, hate them, start to see ourselves in them," and "in a crazy way, become them" (292). Jay-Z illustrates this point,

> It's funny, but the truth is I do hear about guys in corporate offices who psych themselves
> up listening to my music, which sounds odd at first, but makes sense. My friend Steve
> Stoute, who spends a lot of time in the corporate world, tells me about young execs he
> knows who say they discovered their own philosophies of business and life in my lyrics.
> (295)

Jay-Z suggests that music speaks to people and "they don't hear it as some rapper telling them how much better than them he is" (295). Rather, the music can become their own voice as "it taps into the part of them that needs every now and then to say, Fuck it, allow me to reintroduce myself, nigga" (295). And he also suggests that listeners do not feel threatened by rap but rather they are singing along thinking "Yeah, I'm coming for you" to someone. "They might apply it to anything, to taking their next math test or straightening out that chick talking outta pocket in the next cubicle" (25).

Incorporation of Visual Images to Enhance Arguments

Finally, the last persuasive strategy that I will discuss is Jay-Z's incorporation of visual images with the written text to enhance his rhetorical message. *Decoded* contains visual images

on the great majority of its pages. These visuals serve as a way to further engage the reader in the text. Just as Jay-Z spoke of rap being multilayered so too is his autobiography. The reader's eye is drawn to the image or made to linger longer on those pages containing a larger font than the other pages. It encourages the reader to contemplate the message longer and to delve deeper. The use of the different visuals also adds to the artistic element of the text.

The scope of this chapter does not permit an in-depth analysis of all visual images in *Decoded*. I will focus on one example to illustrate how Jay-Z is using image rhetorically to engage his readers and bolster his argument. On pages 58 and 59 of *Decoded* there are two, vivid images. On the left-hand page there is a golden, glittery background with a large red brick sitting on top of it with small flecks of glitter on the brick. On the opposite page the background is a stark white and sitting on top of the page is a solid 10 ounce brick of fine gold. The images are a stark contrast. A reader could quickly turn the page and pass the images by, but given they are quite striking, the eye lingers.

These images symbolize Jay-Z's journey of becoming a Self-Made Man. The red brick represents the Marcy projects where Jay-Z grew up. The glitter indicates that Jay-Z will find a way to transcend that life to become wealthy and successful. He takes the lessons of this environment and uses them to put himself in the financial position to be surrounded by luxury and opulence. That is what the gold brick symbolizes, an announcement that the young boy from the Marcy projects of Brooklyn is no longer surrounded by common bricks. That aspirational glitter on the left page represents that even while hustling Jay-Z had his eyes set on a better life. He turned common bricks into solid gold, into legitimate success.

Conclusion

The hip hop Hustler possesses the potential to shift the historical logics of race and masculinity in the United States. The ethos of the Hustler legitimizes the black male citizen-subject's social and cultural position, not through a mere mimicking of the Self-Made Man, but through a re-imagining of it. The emergence of this subject position forces Americans to question what new configurations of identity become possible in the future because the hustler symbolizes the potential loss of the white American male's historical foil.

The contested nature of national identity allows new and unpredictable figures to act as representatives of the American populace. The primary figure's emergence we have witnessed in the twenty-first century is the "hustler." He is the new Self-Made Man. The Hustler has captured the American imagination and reconfigured the rules of the boot strap myth. The conjuncture detailed the conditions of the "hustler's" emergence. By analyzing and exploring the various contexts informing the birth and persistence of the Hustler we achieve a view of how he is received by various audiences, as well as, unique insight into why he makes these particular rhetorical moves.

A thematic analysis of *Decoded* revealed how this sensibility informs notions of American identity. By exploring how Jay-Z negotiates, challenges, and embraces his own national identity it is possible to identify the rhetorical moves he employs. The insights gained from the conjunctural analysis are valuable because they provide the rich context necessary when reading a text such as *Decoded,* because of its unconventional structure and content. An autobiography is a familiar textual form but Jay-Z produces his text in a way that is unfamiliar and unexpected. His writing is often the assemblage of various contexts and conjunctures. This is best evidenced by his use of footnotes when "decoding" his oeuvre of song lyrics. He uses personal experiences, historical and cultural phenomena, images, and interpretations of his

audience to show how the songs themselves are nodal points that are speaking to the various fields that make their assemblage possible. This approach to criticism serves as a bridge between theory, text, and context. It also produces a more complete account of how a rhetoric is produced and what are the implications of its resonance.

Chapter 5 "Understanding the Uptake and Outcomes of the 'Hustler' Sensibility"

Introduction

"*…*understandings of subjects produced by a multiplicity of discourses will necessarily lead to internal conflict and contradiction. These conflicts in turn create an arena where the governing conceptions of a particular discourse suffer a sort of slippage wherein predominant roles and values lose their claim to absolute authority and subsequently can be altered" (220)

David Gutterman (citing Chantel Mouffe)

"Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity." in *Theorizing Masculinities.*

The Hustler is a black man and historically black men have faced a challenge. To enter spaces that enable one to gain professional and economic success many black men must either omit or minimize the parts of themselves that are recognized as "authentically" black. But hip hop has created a space where black masculinity is visible and not controlled or policed by traditional white standards of acceptability. Through his success the Hustler then becomes a figure that is challenging and resistant, in that, he does not follow the traditional model of assimilation. The Hustler does not embody or reference conventional notions of masculinity (often coded as white) that results in economic success and acceptability. The Hustler establishes a new mode of black masculinity that is possible because of the atrophied rhetorical force of white masculinity. The Hustler is a heroic figure, and as such, differs from historical constructions of black masculinity.

Still, the token example of the hip hop mogul that "makes it" does not glorify or reify the myth of "anyone can make it," but rather the opposite. The American ghetto is proof that not everyone can make it and a lot of people are struggling; the current economic crisis demonstrates that doing the right thing does not equal employment and security (even if you are white and

middle-class). Given this reality, it is not following the legal and traditional paths of success that produces results, but rather, illegal or unimagined ones.

In what follows I will analyze examples of the operation of this new sensibility. But before beginning this discussion it is necessary to explain the features of the new black masculine performance produced by the Hustler. The implications of such a figure is worthy of rhetorical investigation. American identity is informed by the figure and the figure's sensibility, as it is now desirable for uptake.

The Hustler as a New Mode of Black Masculine Performativity

Judith Butler revolutionized the way that gender would be conceived of forever with her seminal work *Gender Trouble.* Here she explains how gender is not a natural essence or biological predisposition, but a socially constructed signification that is performed. A sense of the natural or original regarding gender is maintained through continual performances that are taken-for-granted. Chris Weedon explains that, "the appeal to the 'natural' is one of the most powerful aspects of *common-sense* thinking, but it is a way of understanding social relations which denies history and the possibility of change for the future" (3). One is then rewarded for correct performances and punished for incorrect performances.

Butler aids us in understanding how, not only gender is constructed, but also every aspect of identity in that each of them is "performed and experienced as real, it constitutes a legitimate way through which subjects maintain control over their lives and their image" (Johnson 18). It can be asserted then that performativity is not limited to gender but can also be used to understand performances of such identities as race, nationality, ethnicity, or sexuality. I seek to understand how the figure of the hip hop Hustler creates a new mode of black masculinity that is produced by and through hip hop. It is also important to note the ways in which this new mode

of black masculine performativity challenges and disrupts the status quo, primarily white masculine performativity, and the practices and institutions associated with its privilege and dominance. Before moving into this discussion we must first consider historical figurations of black masculinity, to understand how these constructions not only constrain and prescribe black masculine performativity, but also allows a contrast between past and present.

Representations of Black Masculinity

Historically black men have not been cast in favorable terms. Many of these depictions, as with most modes of representation, have occurred via popular culture. As with any cultural construction, they must be maintained and they are also fluid, unstable, and unpredictable, because these constructions are a reaction to and based on changing social and cultural conditions. These representations are structured within a matrix of various identity categories. As Ronald Jackson II explains, "Black masculine positionings are primarily communication phenomena. Positioning is the axis of ontological difference among separate, but often overlapping masculine identities… facilitat[ing] how masculinity is understood and enacted at any given moment" (134). One of the primary functions of black masculinity is that it serves as the opposite of white masculinity and in turn constitutes and legitimizes white masculinity by serving as its foil. Binary oppositions have historically served as the governing logic of identity formation in the West where identity is grounded in "a series of either/or categories within which individuals are expected to exist" (Gutterman 220-221). Eric Lott explains that "our typical focus on the way 'blackness' in the popular imagination has been produced out of white cultural expropriation and travesty misses how necessary this process is to the making of white American manhood" (*Love Theft* 243). White masculinity could not "exist without a racial other against which it defines itself and which to a very great extent it takes up into itself as one of its own

constituent elements" (Lott, *Love Theft* 243). For instance, if in our popular imaginations black signifies "poor, ignorant, and angry" then white will signify "upper-middle class, educated, and moderate" (Ellis 11).

In many ways imaginings of the black male are a combination of fears that exist in the American psyche (Neal 15). Don Belton explains, "Historically, the black male body has been scapegoated in the cultural imagination to represent the violence we fear as a nation" (2). Racial performativity informs the ways in which we invest in bodies and give them meaning (Johnson 9). This, coupled with the binary nature by which we define identity, means that black males become responsible for, and limited to, only occupying the unprivileged position in the binary. If they move beyond these prescriptions then they are usually viewed as merely attempting to, or successfully enacting, a mode of performativity that does not signify their racial and/or gender identity.

Historically, American representations of black masculinity originate in slavery. Black masculinity and blackness in general had to serve several functions during this time in American history, because without this negative construction of blackness, it would be inhumane and unjust to participate in slavery. First, black men (and women) were often thought to be animalistic and uncivilized. This promoted a binary of white/black that by extension drew on other binaries such as civilized/savage and human/inhuman. These binaries served as a way to create and maintain "distance and disdain" and also proved to slave-owners that "Black bodies were devoid of interiority or basic thinking and reasoning skills" (Jackson 15). By viewing slaves in this manner, not only could slave owners and whites more generally feel no guilt, but they could also use the logic to further promote themselves as the perfect subject of Enlightenment. Secondly, slaves served as the "dark mirror in which the white America-as-

citizen could study his refined and enlightened self" (Smith-Rosenberg 389). The third way in which this logic hung together was by casting black males as savage. This made it possible to characterize black men as violent and aggressive, and as such, required control and discipline through the use of bodily harm. Simply it was imagined that highly, rational subjects were justified in the subjugation of a primitive subject.

Once slavery was abolished many white men were put in the awkward position of having to face their inhumanity and savage conduct, which often consisted of physically harming and killing black people, and sexually assaulting black women. To justify the egregious acts of white men raping free black women and lynching free black men, the myth of the black rapist was conceived and circulated in American culture (Davis 1981). At this time it was believed that women served as the bastion of morality and that the moral fabric of a group of people rested in the hands of women. White women were constructed as chaste and pure resulting in a civilization of white people that were morally superior and civilized. In constructing black women as the opposite of white women, whites were able to characterize black women as savage and licentious, and it would *naturally* follow that black men would be violent, indecent, and possess an insatiable or animalistic sexual appetite. Unspeakable acts of terror were committed by whites against blacks, and this was largely justified by a belief that black women were wanton sexual beings, and black men would obtain sexual release at any moment without thought of consequence (Davis 1981).

Another less threatening, but still damaging construction of black masculinity, "the minstrel," appears in the late 1800s and maintains popularity through the early 1900s (Jackson 23). This is the time when American popular culture really emerges, and also the time at which suffrage was being extended to non-property owning white males. The minstrel marks yet

another way in which constructions of black males serve as a way to justify America's sociopolitical and economic structure (Ogbar 16-17). Jeffrey Ogbar asserts that the expansion of voting rights created the need for something like minstrel shows, which were comprised of "buffoonish styles" of singing, dancing, and the use of black vernacular speech, where black males were often depicted as "infantile… underscoring the importance of race to the meaning of democracy in America" (13). These characterizations served the main function of reiterating and justifying that black males were indeed "unfit for the responsibilities of democracy" (Ogbar 13). The characters in minstrel shows did not only serve as innocuous forms of entertainment, but ultimately, as a way to define white masculinity and national identity. As Ogbar explains,

> While white America prided itself on its scientific and technological achievements at world fairs, government, scholarship, and in other areas, the carefree, happy, and irresponsible Negro offered a sharp contrast to articulations of whiteness and national identity. (14)

With the birth of film at the beginning of the twentieth century, America witnessed the birth of one of the most powerful and pervasive means of circulating modes of representation and prescriptions for identity. In *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media,* Ronald Jackson II identifies three major characterizations of black men that occurred in film during this era: Sambo, Uncle Tom, and Buck. A Sambo figure is what many would refer to as a "coon," that is, harmless, loved by whites, and overall a "happy slave." Uncle Tom characters are accommodating, loyal, and faithful servants. They often embody Christian values and tolerate mistreatments by whites. While the first two tropes are relatively harmless, the Buck, however, should be feared by whites because he is strong, athletic, physically intimidating, and often characterized as a man seeking to rape white women. Jackson

notes that what is overall damaging to black identity about these conceptions is that they result in black males always being cast in negative terms such as exotic, sexual, violent, incompetent, uneducated, irresponsible, and exploitable.

Most of these tropes persist in cinema and the popular imagination throughout the majority of the twentieth century. There are some challenges to these constructions, such as those characters played by actor Sidney Poitier, but there largely is no variation culturally until the 1980s. During this time we witness the arrival of what Patricia Hill-Collins labeled "the buddy." Two common examples of the black man as a buddy figure are Bill Cosby and Michael Jordan. Cosby depicts a safe, black, upper middle-class man and this non-threatening professional is one that whites imagined they could easily relate to and befriend. Michael Jordan was the athlete everyone could root for and his long-running Nike and Hanes campaigns added to his appeal. Black buddies are appealing and comforting to white audiences in that they cannot imagine them "stealing silverware, reverting to Black English, or raping the wife" (Hill-Collins 166-167). They also fulfill a need culturally by being "stripped of seemingly dangerous parts of Blackness, leaving the useful parts as sufficient markers of difference to satisfy the tastes of a multicultural America" (Hill-Collins 168).

In the 1980s as we begin to see the popularization of the buddy, another new figure of black masculinity begins to emerge via rap music and hip hop culture, the hustler or gansta'. Although some might suggest this figure is just a twenty-first century Buck, this equation is not tenable given the Hustler's creativity, intelligence, and rhetorical savvy, as discussed in chapter four.

The logic of binary oppositions structure social relations and notions of various modes of identity performativity. Historically black men have been faced with the challenge of how

they are to obtain economic success and at the same time maintain some semblance of their identity as a black man. The status of middle-class is associated with whiteness, and when a black man occupies that space, he is often imagined to be "less manly" or "subordinate" when working within white-run organizations (Hill-Collins 175-176). This can result in class mobility being viewed as undesirable to some black boys and men, because it is assumed that one has to give up their "blackness" to achieve success. Patricia Hill-Collins explains,

> Through Black working-class eyes, Black elected officials, businesspersons, corporate executives, and academics may resemble 'academic sidekicks' or 'intellectual punks.' These are the men who increasingly fail to defend African American interests because they fail to defy White male power. Instead, they tolerate and in many cases collude in reproducing conditions in the inner city… If the 'academic sidekick' or 'intellectual sissy' becomes seen by African American boys and young men as the price they have to pay for racial integration, it should not be surprising that increasing numbers of young Black men reject this route to success. (176-177)

A shedding of blackness is necessary to enter traditional spaces guarded and run by white privilege and interests. Historically, there is a sense that "authentic" black culture can enter "white" spaces but authentic blacks themselves cannot (Hill-Collins 177). This is evidenced by the ways in which black art forms and music have always been a part of American culture, especially as they have been appropriated by white artists.

Hip hop, however, disrupts this trajectory. The hip hop mogul becomes a challenge to white centrality, ultimately, because his is not a model of assimilation. He is typical in that he is "male, entrepreneurial, and prestigious in both cultural influence and personal wealth," but is atypical given that he is "young, black, [and] tethered either literally or symbolically to

America's disenfranchised inner cities" (Smith 70). So his presence not only impacts notions of race and masculinity but also how one is able to obtain success. Skold and Rhen describe how a valuation of a different type of culture and new channels of success are promoted by the figure of the hip hop mogul. Hip hop culture contains an ethos that does not promote traditional spaces of education and success, such as "universities, incubator environments, technology parks, conference rooms, and the mythical business lunch," and instead points to a "hardcore urban environment" as a "significant space of value creation" (Skold & Rhen 75-76).

Not only does the hip hop Hustler generate a new mode of black masculinity but also a new mode of American citizenship. Recall earlier I stated the ways in which hip hop culture reconfigures American culture, and the hip hop Hustler reconfigures American identity. The primary understanding of national identity is cast as white and male. This subject has historically been the binary opposite of women and blacks (as detailed in chapters one and three). When white centrality, and by extension masculinity, is thwarted, our understandings of American identity are as well. This centrality is most effectively challenged by a disruption of the American dream and the doings of the Self-Made Man. Being American is not merely a blood-tie, but rather, the embodiment of a certain set of ideals and virtues. One must demonstrate these American ideals and virtues, and is most effectively accomplished by using rights and inborn traits to accrue wealth and social standing. The Self-Made Man has historically been the mark of the American man (Kimmel, *Manhood in America* 17). One way in which the hip hop Hustler positions himself as a representation of America is the way in which he reworks long held notions of the American dream. The black male figure of hip hop, by reimagining and retelling the narrative of the American dream, becomes a new inheritor of the legacy of Americana (Fleetwood 152). Hip hop Hustlers reshape capitalist desires, and in doing so, their

music takes a very Americanist tone that "shout[s] 'U.S.A' as loudly as any patriotic rally" (Reeves 207). The Hustler figure defies previous representation of black masculinity and is the first fully American black man that is not merely seeking to assimilate to white culture. This figure embodies American ideals and as such is a desirable candidate for uptake.

One area of uptake is through fashion and products. These commodities circulate a new American identity that originates, not with a white center, but a black periphery, and it is through this popularization that black culture and a black American aesthetic enters the center. Tricia Fleetwood refers to this as a "syncretic process" that amalgamates components of an urban thug with Americana, creating a character that is "at once an ultra-stylish thug and the ultimate American citizen" (154). This "syncretic process" is largely responsible for the success of the hip hop Hustler and hip hop in general. Fleetwood asserts these commodities "signify racialized and gendered specificity through the marketing of the urban black male icon while appealing to a wide range of young consumers of various races" (154). These products resonate with a large portion of the populace because of the desire for a simultaneous return of a romanticized past and for something new and specific to the twenty-first century that Americans are grabbling with. Fleetwood states that fashion houses such as Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, and Phat Farm have created new "sites of coolness through a reappropriation of the aesthetics of Americana" that "exploit cultural nostalgia for a mythic national past while re-envisioning urban b-boys and those who want to be such hipsters as the native-born sons and inheritors of 'the America' of myth" (159). Indeed in a capitalist culture one way that we demonstrate our patriotism and American-ness is through the purchasing of goods. This inclination has simply been capitalized upon by hip hop Hustlers, and in this process, they also reconfigured racial identity and the ways

in which it is tied up in and signifies national identity. Fleetwood cites Def Jam Records co-founder and business magnate Russell Simmons as an example,

> In the post-September 11 era, Simmons is even more explicit in invoking nationalism, possessing the symbols of Americana, and framing consumerism in patriotic terms. Simmons constructs race on nationalistic terms as a performative engagement with social and symbolic signs and through participation in certain practices as a consumer. He argues that hip-hop fashion becomes a shared language for the imagined nation as envisioned by hip-hop entrepreneurs. (166)

It might be objected that this phenomenon is nothing more than a mere fad that will pass without making any significant lasting marks on our cultural landscape. On the contrary, as Andre Harrell states, hip hop "is not about a moment… This is way past a moment. This is Americana; this is a culture change" (Fleetwood 171). As Fleetwood notes, hip hop Hustlers are, in a way, our new "forefathers" in the twenty-first century and they continue to reinvent "the legacy and 'greatness' of America" (Fleetwood 171-172). Hip hop, and the Hustler aesthetic it promotes, has become a mode of American style, and they are not only being viewed that way nationally but, perhaps more importantly, internationally as well.

The Hustler Sensibility: Pull Yourself Up by Your (Timberland) Boot Strap

"The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal."

Jean-Francois Lyotard

The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge

Jean-Francois Lyotard asserts in *The Postmodern Condition* that there has been a collective loss of faith in longstanding "metanarratives." One such narrative is that rationality

and reason would result in highly progressive societies. One of the most influential philosophical orientations Americans imported and adjusted to their needs was Enlightenment. This worldview was necessary for the founding of the nation, the creation of systems and institutions, as well providing a vision for the America to come. Lyotard explains the importance and necessity of these metanarratives,

> These narratives are not myths in the sense that fables would be… Of course, like myths, they have the goal of legitimating social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics, ways of thinking. Unlike myths, however, they look for legitimacy, not in an original founding act, but in a future to be accomplished, that is, in an Idea to be realized. This Idea (of freedom, "enlightenment," socialism, etc.) has legitimating value because it is universal. It guides every human reality. (*The Postmodern Explained* 18*).*

The death of the American metanarrative is largely due to a general sense of a loss of faith in the "legitimating social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics, ways of thinking" coupled with a great deal of uncertainty over what constitutes, and who can count as American, many citizens are open to and searching for an a new national ideal, a new hero.

As discussed earlier, one of the most foundational and cherished beliefs of American culture is the bootstrap myth. It is believed that through hard work and following the rules one can succeed and "make it." This narrative of an equal playing field is consistent with the American values of rugged individualism and the entrepreneurial spirit. It also assures Americans that they are indeed equal, free, and living in the land of liberty. As I assert in chapter four, the hip hop Hustler is *not* another African-American token that reassures America that they are now free from a racist past, and that indeed anyone can make it in America (even a young, poor man from the urban ghetto). Rather the Hustler in general, and Jay-Z in particular,

ruins the fairytale with the harsh realities of stories from the "hood" where young men stand a small chance of escaping (and in some ways never can regardless of the wealth they accrue) and if they do, it is certainly not by following the steps encouraged by the bootstrap myth. The disillusionment of the Hustler is in many ways arguably consistent with the era in which he emerges.

The Hustler Hero

Nowhere is this loss of faith more apparent than among young, black men growing up in urban America. The civil rights movement was in many ways viewed as a failure, as discussed in chapter three. The result, according to Jay-Z, was a "generation split" between those of the civil rights generation and the hip hop generation,

> Kids my age were serving them [crack addicts]. And these new little kamikazes, who simply called themselves hustlers (like generations before us), were everywhere, stacking their ones. Fuck waiting for the city to pass out summer jobs. I wasn't even a teenager yet and suddenly everyone I knew had pocket money. And better… When Biggie rhymed about how *things done changed* he could've meant from one summer to the next. It wasn't a generational shift but generational split… Authority was turned upside down. Guys my age, fed up with watching their moms struggle on a single income, were paying utility bills with money from hustling. So how could those same mothers sit them down about a truant report? (13)

The city of New York, and others like it, witnessed its young men become "pagan." I mean this in the way Jean-Francois Lyotard uses the term in *Just Gaming*. In one sense to be pagan means to judge or approach something without referencing a set of criteria. For Lyotard to judge something in the conventional sense means to apply and follow prescriptions. What happens

when prescriptions are ignored because they do not seem applicable and codes are not followed, as is the case with the young men Jay-Z describes above? These were young men who were not going to wait for the system to work in the form of a public education or summer job. They also were no longer subject to the authority of society and the law, much less their parents (namely mothers) and in many ways become the authority figure in their households because they bring home the most income and carry weapons. The "code" must be redrawn (Lyotard, *Just Gaming* 17). In this redrawing it is not only about creating new criteria, but more importantly, "it is the power to invent criteria" (Lyotard, *Just Gaming* 17). These young hustlers created new rules for their game and with it naturally a type of sensibility is produced. This sensibility can be found in the hip hop culture and its various expressions, namely rap music, and this sensibility shapes the Hustler's version of how to make it in America.

The Hustler's story is a type of "out-law discourse." Sloop and Ono describe an out-law as one who "acts on behalf of his or her own community via a local logic, that when translated into the dominant system of judgment, is deemed illegal, illogical, and immoral" (719). These individuals and discourses are outside the law because they do not share the same "shared logics of justice" or "ideas of right and wrong," and as such, create and operate by a different code of ethics, possessing a system of judgment different from mainstream culture (Sloop and Ono 719). These discourses, according to Sloop and Ono, are rhetorically significant because they not only present the logics of often marginalized groups ("vernacular discourses"), but because they challenge individuals to rethink their ways of operating, their forms of judgment, and their logics (Sloop and Ono 727-728).

The outlaw engages in actual criminal behavior in a literal sense, but can also be someone that engages in socially criminal behavior in that they violate long held assumptions that

maintain class and race relations. As Imani Perry states the outlaw opposes "norms that unfairly punish black communities or discount the complexity of choices faced by those black and poor in the United States" (103). The outlaw creates alternative "values, norms, and ideals in contrast to those embraced by American society" (Perry 103). The Hustler then initially operates in a different cultural space that is not mainstream America and troubles the authority and confines of the law (Skold & Rhen 76). The outlaw, hustler, or gansta(er) is an icon that has become a part of the fabric of Americana and it has come to no longer resemble a threat to its audiences as much as a "posturing as a performance of racial alterity, of self-conscious differentiation based on familiar tropes of race" (Fleetwood 173).

The Hustler augments the American Dream story as it gets retold through the logic of an out-law discourse. Rags-to-riches stories abound in our nation as well as a certain gangster ethos that is present in historical figures such as Billy the Kid and Al Capone. The gangster is also a popular culture figure as evidenced by the success of numerous mafia films such as the *Godfather* trilogy, *Scarface,* and *Goodfellas.* What is new and bordering on the nonsensical about the Hustler is that never do we witness a Rockefeller having John Gotti roots. This is because the narrative of the bootstrap puller requires legal conduct. This is reflected by the often cited expression of the Mafia, which no gangster gets to retire in a house on the hill. The very legality of hard work proves that the system works and that the equal playing field exists. If the field were not equal, then there may perhaps be justification or necessity to cheat or usurp it by taking a route that is not consistent with the rules. When individuals lose faith in the system, in national myths, Americans are left searching for alternative tales or logics to navigate this new ambiguous territory. It is such a terrain that creates the conditions for improbable rhetorics to flourish, as well as, the emergence of an improbable figure such as the Hustler. I return again to

Lawrence Grossberg to account for the ways in which the Hustler sensibility not only rewrites the American Dream story, and augments the Self-Made Man, but also how this new sensibility has traveled to discursive fields outside of urban America and hip hop culture.

Shifting Affective Regimes… "Beat the System Before it Beats You."

As discussed in chapter two, culture is one of the three prominent domains informing this modern era according to Lawrence Grossberg. In chapter four I focused on the domain of the economic because this is the space, with its constituting logic of commensuration, which largely accounts for the emergence and production of the Hustler sensibility. Now, by turning to the domain of culture, it can be understood how the Hustler sensibility is indeed informing and transforming American identity and ethos.

Grossberg states that euro-modernity requires a space where we can both "describe and judge the changes in everyday life," and culture is this space, "simultaneously the standard and the position from which and against which one can judge those changes" (*Cultural Studies* 189). What is at stake in this judgment, Grossberg tells us, is "the very nature of human's social life, of the forms of association and communication, of the way the various specific activities of life were integrated together into a coherent and meaningful totality" (*Cultural Studies* 189). The constituting logic of culture is mediation. Grossberg asserts that mediation in many ways is "a theory of reality constructing itself" and is always in a state of becoming, in that "reality is always and only relational, and that it can be mapped only as an unpredictable, non-linear, and multiple series of relations" (*Cultural Studies* 190). This is largely his conception because of his agreement with Deleuze and Guattari, who assert that reality produces itself through the process of coding a discursive space with meaning. Coding in a sense is similar to signification or a kind

of grafting of meaning. Once this meaning has been coded, the space is then said to be "territorialized." Discourse is central to this process because "discourse can produce many different kinds of mediations of effects, and these effects can then be articulated to many different uses, for example, nation-building, identity, education and civilizing" (Grossberg, *Cultural Studies* 191-192). The best vocabulary that can be used to apprehend and explain the process of mediation is affect (Grossberg, *Cultural Studies* 192). There are many different ways to define and use this term, but when Grossberg uses it, he is describing a "complex set of mediations/effects" that produce an "energy of mediation" (*Cultural Studies* 193). This energy is the degree of intensity of feeling.

There are three plateaus of existence for affect in Grossberg's theorization. The first is "virtual" and "ontological" because the fundamental being of reality is "constituting a pure capacity or potentiality to affect and be affected" (*Cultural Studies 193).* The second is expressive and material, in that, this is where affect shapes habits or the habitual. The example Grossberg provides is a group of men witnessing a pregnant woman falling. It would seem natural, or even instinctual, that the men would reach for and help the woman to her feet. This "instinct" would not exist if the men were raised with religious teachings that prohibited the men from touching women. This second plateau is largely "organized by discursive or cultural apparatuses, which are in turn sites/agents of production and the struggle over the real" (*Cultural Studies* 194). Finally, the third plateau is comprised of what Grossberg calls expressive regimes. They are called regimes because Grossberg is referring to the logics that organize the intensities of feelings "which define the affective tonalities and modalities of existence, behavior, and experience" (*Cultural Studies* 194). These regimes are only effective or make sense within larger discursive formations. In summation, the first plateau (ontological/virtual) is the universal

fact that affect structures human existence, the second plateau (expressive) are the habits or actions that result from feeling, and the third plateau (regimes of feeling) is what orders and informs how one makes sense of their feelings.

Culture then produces "affective apparatuses" that "construct the feeling of existence" and "defines the way any relation is lived, the way any value is 'attached' to the real" (*Cultural Studies* 194). Recall from chapter three, I discussed how Grossberg asserts that certain sensibilities have the potential to be articulated to domains and spaces for which the discourse was not intended. Once this discourse is effectively absorbed, or adopted in this outside space, the process of "uptake" is complete. This is relevant to the discussion of affect in that these sensibilities inform and shape affective structures.

Much of American identity can be best summarized by the bootstrap myth because indeed it crystalizes and demonstrates that Americans are free, equal, just, individualistic, and hardworking. The bootstrap myth then is a kind of affective regime, and as such, directs and informs intensity of feeling, and also the habits and behaviors of Americans. This regime produces a sensibility, one that values honest, hard work as well as trust and investment in the various American institutions and systems. So, if one fully invests in this affective regime, they will take personal responsibility for a lack of success, such as unemployment or as Kimmel puts it, "if America [is] the land of abundance, where anyone [can] go from rags to riches, then conversely you [can] blame only yourself it you [don't] make it" (*Angry White Men* 20). Consider the young person that earns good marks in high school and their undergraduate studies. This young person graduates from college with honors, has completed two internships, and yet still is unable to gain viable employment outside of the food industry. This young person, if fully invested in the affective regime that the bootstrap myth facilitates, would direct all, or most,

of their frustrations inwards, and would look to the ways in which they are not doing something they should as meaning they are coming up short. This is not an uncommon tale as many college graduates are experiencing unemployment and half of college graduates are working in a field that does not require a college education (Kingkade, "Unemployment for Recent College Graduates"*).*

As detailed in chapters one and three, some Americans are losing investment and belief in this affective regime, and its corresponding sensibilities, leaving them open to search for and embrace a new regime and sensibility. This sense of frustration and disillusionment leaves many searching for a way to be rendered whole again. Even those individuals that are extremely patriotic are losing faith in the American Dream. This frustration and anger, according to Kimmel, is "more than defensive; it is reactionary" as it "seeks to restore, to retrieve, to reclaim something that is perceived to have been lost" (*Angry White Men* 21). In *Angry White Men* Michael Kimmel interviewed white patriots, aged mid-twenties to mid-forties, and found that they feel the system is "stacked against them" because they live in a world where people that look less like them rule. These men also will not have a future as good, much less better than, that of their father or grandfather, because they have seen the economic ruin of their families and communities due to the closing of factories, farms, and small, independent businesses. While these individuals would not find the Hustler to be a hero, but rather their villain, it is nonetheless very telling that there is a lack of faith in American systems even in the nation's heartland.

The Hustler, and the sensibility his retelling of the American Dream produces, is very appealing to many Americans who have lost faith in, and no longer invest in, the previous affective regime associated with the bootstrap myth. At its most basic, the hip hop sensibility tells Americans you are not to blame for your failure and frustration, the system is to blame. By

detailing for his readers all of the ways in which it was impossible for him to succeed by legal means, Jay-Z demonstrates that many of the tenets undergirding the affective structure of American identity are deceptive, if not an outright lie. The Hustler does not follow the rules of the system – getting a summer job, attending college, and pursuing legal employment – but rather, he games the system by creating a new set of rules and criteria for accessing his situation and options. When adopting this new sensibility a new kind of affective response is produced. Consider the recent college graduate mentioned above. This person would now not look inward for reasons for their failure, but would rather look to the institutions and systems in place that are failing them. This is a person that has played by the rules and has yet to see this rule following pay off. The response of feeling that the system, not the individual, is responsible for the lack of desired success is how the Hustler sensibility is acting as a new affective regime that produces this different kind of emotional response, as well as, producing different habits and behaviors. The uptake of this sensibility is explored in greater detail in the section to follow.

Tracing the Uptake of the Hustler Sensibility

One example that one may be tempted to point to as an instance of the uptake of the Hustler sensibility would be what has been crudely labeled the "wigger." A "wigger" is a young, white man that identifies with, and takes on the fashions, but not always the ethos, of the Hustler. These young men are said to be "acting black." In *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankster, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America*, Bakari Kitwana explains that this group of American men is varied and complex. The reasons for wishing to adopt a persona or ethos, that differs from that characteristic of your own culture, in this instance can be attributed to the young seeking a sense of danger and edge. These young men are viewing and appropriating hip hop culture and commodities as a way to add "spice" to their world. This is

very similar to the process of cultural appropriation that bell hooks describes in "Eating the Other." But many of these men are also seeking a cultural outlet that speaks to them and that they can identify with. For Kitwana this is not always appropriation, but rather a respectful, true valuing of the hip hop culture. This group of young, American men has a range of reasons for being drawn to hip hop, and their impulses are far too hard to discern or overgeneralize. The young men are also an obvious example of "uptake," but their affective commitments are at times superficial. Beyond the obvious example of the "wigger," the Hustler sensibility of gaming the system, or creating a new set of rules for the game, has traveled to many discursive spaces in American culture. To demonstrate the breadth of the uptake of the Hustler sensibility I will analyze representations of it reflected in film and television.

Film and Television: Representations of the Uptake of the Hustler Sensibility

In this section I examine the film *Office Space* and the television series *Weeds* and *Breaking Bad,* all of which signal a change in American sensibility.

Office Space

The film *Office Space* has become a cult favorite. Its release in 1999 coincides with what many have dubbed the golden year of hip hop. In what follows, I will examine three iconic scenes in the film that are central to the storyline, and are aided by the accompaniment of rap songs. These scenes demonstrate the characters transitioning from a more conventional affective regime to that of Hustler sensibility. It should also be noted that the film's soundtrack plays a large role in the emotional tenor of the film. The music of the film is almost entirely rap. Using the music of the Hustler indicates that the characters are embodying his ethos; their activities are not necessarily that of the Hustler activities, but do provoke a similar emotional response in the

characters and the viewers. The music serves as a cue to the viewer that the men are about to inhabit the persona of someone that is experienced at engaging in subversive activities.

The film centers on Peter Gibbons, an unfulfilled programmer that works at a software company called Initech, where the office is filled with cubicles. The reality of outsourcing and downsizing are addressed as Peter and his coworkers are subjected to evaluations by a company specializing in making recommendations for how to increase a company's productivity and profit margins. The film reflects the harsh reality that virtually no one in America has job security.

The film begins with Peter stuck in traffic and being extremely anxious and frustrated. The scene is accompanied by a conventional movie score of orchestral music. Various horns are used to mimic and create the sense of frustration. The music, and the affective response it produces, is important because the movie takes a dramatic turn after Peter undergoes hypnosis by an "occupational hypnotherapist." During the session the therapist dies of a massive heart attack, leaving Peter in a permanent state of hypnosis where he is in a "deep state of relaxation." This new states renders him carefree and unconcerned with work or paying bills.

Upon Peter's return to the office after the hypnosis session he wears flip flops, jeans, and casual shirts. The first thing he has to do is meet with the efficiency experts. He tells Bob and Bob that he feels deeply unmotivated at work and probably only completes fifteen minutes of actual work a week. He puts it simply, "I work my ass off and Initech gets a few more shipments out. I don't see anything… I do just enough to not get fired." The efficiency experts determine Peter to be a "straight shooter with upper management written all over him." Peter voices the frustration many Americans experience where regardless of whether they work hard or not they

rarely see a real pay-off for their efforts. This reveals the system of hard work equaling success and fulfillment to be a fraud.

Following Peter's meeting with the efficiency experts we see Peter walking slowly into the office the next day in casual attire. The Geto Boys song "Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta" plays as a series of vignettes show how different Peter's approach to work is now that he is free of anxiety and misery. There is a doorknob that always shocks him when he turns it to enter the office. He takes a hand drill from a maintenance man. The drill resembles a gun in shape, and he wields it like one to remove the doorknob, and later uses it to dismantle his cubicle wall to give himself a view of the window. He does other things that disgruntled employees only dream of, such as showing up late to work, openly playing games on the computer, fishing on a workday and then cleaning his catch on his work desk. The message of the song matches Peter's actions. In reference to "Damn it Feels Good to be a Gansta," "A real gansta-ass nigga" versus a "nigga" is the difference between someone that is calm and confidant in their life and position, versus someone that is insecure and having to overcompensate for their shortcomings. Peter, free of anxieties and worries, can now be a "real gansta-ass nigga" because he is confident and carefree enough to live life the way others only dream.

Peter's coworkers and friends, Samir Nagheenanajar and Michael Bolton, become intrigued by his new approach to work and life. Peter's carefree attitude allows him to verbalize just how silly and pointless the tasks of work can be. When Peter discovers that Samir and Michael will lose their jobs, per the efficiency experts' recommendation, and that he in fact is getting promoted, Samir and Michael are emboldened to take revenge on Initech by creating a computer virus that will divert small fractions of Initech's profits to a bank account the men control. The idea is that the amount would be too small for the company to notice. Samir

initially feels reluctant and fearful. Peter seeks to anger Samir by asking him why they should play by the rules just so he and Michael can be fired and Initech's stock value can go up. Peter laughs and says, "Illegal? This is America." Peter then comments on how white-collar criminals usually only serve a few months in jail, jails that are more like resorts than prisons. Still needing to coax him more Peter says, "Samir you came here looking for the land of opportunity and this is the opportunity." This comment speaks to the loss of faith in the American dream. Samir is a fine programmer (perhaps the best in the company), has worked hard, and now he is facing unemployment. Indeed the new opportunity in America, as Peter describes it, is beating the system before it beats you.

The scene following this interaction is the final day of Michael and Samir's employment. This is the day that Peter must take the virus the other two men created and download it to the mainframe. This rather simple and nonviolent act is styled as a very delicate and highly dangerous operation. The men move in slow motion to Ice Cube's "Down for Whatever." The song is slow and menacing, conveying the message that you have to be "down for whatever," or put another way, to do whatever is necessary to enjoy life and prosper financially.

Once the virus has been uploaded viewers see Peter, Michael, and Samir driving away from Initech together. They are discussing how easy and anticlimactic uploading the virus had been. Peter brightens the mood by telling his friends that he got them a gift – the office printer that never worked and was a constant source of frustration for both Samir and Michael. They take the printer to an isolated field and smash it to Geto Boys' "Still." The scene is shot in slow motion and often from an angle looking up from the ground, as though viewers are seeing the assault from the eyes of a victim. "Still," as the anthem of the destruction of the printer, symbolizes the three men's victory over Initech. The song is about maintaining one's street

credibility and never backing down. Geto Boys rap that they are just as dangerous after achieving success as they were when living the street life. Michael and Samir revel in revenge and the "gansta" approach taken to exact this revenge.

This film in many ways expresses a hip hop sensibility. While not subjected to the harsh realities of urban America, these men are still trapped in an environment that makes them feel repressed, frustrated, and exploited. Movie critic, Steven Rea, in his review of the film states it depicts,

> People miserable in their work and their lives. These white-collar drones wonder whether happiness is even a possibility in a numbing universe of office parks, chain restaurants, and lookalike suburbia. Judge [writer, director] captures the quiet rage and solitary despair of the cubicle class, and he does it with subversive, biting humor. ("A Look at the Misery of the Cubicle Class")

The film also implies that the promise of a good life seems like a betrayal. These men have earned degrees in what is believed to be the secure field of technology. They all follow the rules that Americans are told will ensure success, and yet, their work leaves them miserable and they fear unemployment due to downsizing. The way that they take control of their life and situation is to find a way to subvert the system by creating the computer virus that will divert money from the company to their bank account. R.W. Connell asserts that this feeling of powerlessness among men in the twenty-first century is common since those in tech fields often are those who have "a claim to expertise but who lack the social authority given by wealth, the status of the old professions or corporate power" (165).

This film is one of the first to follow a now common pattern in Hollywood of using rap music as a way to prepare the audience for "something to go down." Moments of rule breaking, risk taking, or coming into one's own are often set to the beat of hip hop. These movie soundtracks speaks to Jay-Z's point that because of, and through hip hop, people are transformed; they become, to a certain extent the character that their favorite rap artist performs in his songs (292).

Weeds and Breaking Bad

The enactment of the Hustler sensibility can include becoming not only a metaphorical Hustler, but at times a literal one. *Weeds* (2005 -2012) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) are television series that center on drug dealers. These Hustlers are not young, black men from the ghettoes of America, but are rather middle-class, white, suburbanites. These shows speak to the frustration that many Americans are dealing with in the twenty-first century as we witness the seeming disappearance of the middle-class.[3]

Weeds and *Breaking Bad* feature seemingly farfetched plot lines but they represent certain aspects of reality that are not unimaginable to many Americans. Both leading characters, Nancy Botwin of *Weeds* and Walter White of *Breaking Bad,* find themselves in a situation where they need to supplement their income by dealing drugs. These series suggest that it is not only a particular group, but rather a large portion of Americans that are finding reason to question the

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[3] Gilens and Page, using a multivariate analysis, are able to assert that economic elites and organized groups that represent business interests have significant influence over U.S. governmental policy and that the average citizen has little or no influence. Simply put, these scholars have produced statistically significant proof that the United States is a functional oligarchy by tracking changes in policy over a twenty-five year span. The results show that it is not the average citizen's voice, interests, and aims that are being met but rather a small wealthy, elite class.

affective regime produced by the belief in the American dream. When placed within a system that does not deliver on its promises, it becomes more easy and justifiable to not play by its rules.

Nancy Botwin, a middle-class soccer mom, struggles to provide for her family upon being widowed. To generate enough money to support her family, and maintain her upper-middle class lifestyle, she turns to selling marijuana to her wealthy, white, suburban community. The actress that plays Botwin, Mary-Louise Parker, states she was drawn to the role because "I thought it was a really honest depiction of this world that wasn't entirely of a pristine morality. I thought she (author Jenji Kohan) really examined a different side of suburbia and middle-class life than you usually see" (Lee, "Mary-Louise Parker deals with motherhood"). The edgy notion that a white, soccer mom would be selling marijuana is the initial hook of the series, but it ultimately is a "dark satire" that examines "dysfunctional suburbia, where adults are addicted to their SUVs, lattes and insecurities while their children see their parents' hypocrisies but are speeding toward their own empty adulthoods (Henerson, "Stoned in the Suburbs"). The unhappiness and lack of fulfillment of the characters further illustrate a loss of faith in the American dream, where happiness is equated with a nuclear family and home in the suburbs. Writer of the show, Jenji Kohan, says *Weeds* shows a woman refusing to be the "oldest Gap employee in America" and doing "something she's good at" to "keep her family and life together" (Itzkoff, "Mommy,What's That"). In other words, Nancy is not willing to take a dead end job with low wages.

The first season of *Weeds* addresses several contemporary social issues to support the argument for the selling of drugs.   In addition to showing that Nancy cannot find viable employment, the show addresses the crooked nature of various institutions, the problems with

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the American healthcare system, and college debt. The show positions Nancy Botwin as someone who is pursuing their own version of the American Dream.

First, the show addresses the common, yet illegal practices, of those in positions of institutional authority. This is best exemplified by the character Doug Wilson, played by Kevin Nealon. Doug is a certified public accountant and city council member. He has a great deal of pull in the town of Agrestic and is one of Nancy's best customers. Aside from giving Nancy financial advice, he also has a stake in Nancy succeeding because he does not want to lose his dealer, and he sees an opportunity to gain something financially as well. He proposes that Nancy set up a "front business" that the drug money can be funneled through, allowing her to make deposits to her bank account and pay her bills. Nancy also receives legal advice on how to bend and work around rules from another customer, lawyer Dean Hodes. Later in the season Nancy meets another attorney, Ms. Greenstein, who specializes in the unique laws governing the use, selling, growing, and distribution of marijuana. Her legal specialty is representing individuals whose charges involve marijuana in some way. These characters demonstrate that it is not only in the streets where people are gaming the system and creating their own rules.

Second, the show speaks to the struggles many Americans face because of the structure of the healthcare system. Nancy's son falls from the roof of the family's pergola. She takes him to the hospital for a broken arm. Her family does not have health insurance and the bill requires that she spend virtually all of the money she had that week from selling marijuana. This reflects the position so many Americans face when attempting to pay medical bills. The one incident, a common occurrence among children, ruins her financially and results in her being unable to pay her utility bills. While her money may have been earned illegally, there are plenty of Americans working legally that can relate to the scene. One is also left to ponder what position Nancy

would face if she had been legally employed and earning far less than the revenue she makes from selling marijuana.

Third, the growing financial difficulty of attending college is addressed. Nancy ventures to a local community college, Valley State, to find a math tutor for her son. She notices there are students everywhere smoking marijuana and doing little to conceal it. She sees this as an opportunity to expand and open a new market. She enlists a student, Sanjay, to sell the drugs on campus. Nancy admits she is shocked that someone as intelligent as Sanjay would be attending community college and taking the risk of selling drugs. Sanjay replies, "I'm a highly intelligent underachiever with debt" ("Higher Education"). He goes on to state that he is working his way through college. Sanjay represents the millions of Americans that are finding it very difficult to finance their college educations and the near impossibility to afford the degree.

Finally, *Weeds* is ultimately the story about a widowed woman that decides to become an entrepreneur to take care of her family. Throughout season one, Nancy finds ways to grow her business and make larger and larger profits. She shows a great deal of ingenuity and determination when faced with obstacles. For example, "Pot clubs" begin opening in her area, in which people can obtain legal, medical marijuana. Her largest customer base, her lawyer and accountant among them, seem uninterested in her product because they can purchase it legally at the clubs. She learns that the clubs provide a higher quality and different varieties of marijuana, and also, many varieties of "edibles" (baked goods containing marijuana oil). Feeling discouraged she goes to her supplier's home. One of her supplier's foot soldiers, Conrad, tells Nancy not to despair, saying, significantly, "You're a hustler. You're going to do just fine" ("Good Shit Lollipop"). She does not give up, but rather requests higher quality marijuana and begins making edibles.

She takes the new products to her customers and they seem skeptical at first. Nancy asks them why they should drive into Los Angles when they could just buy locally from her. When the men still seem unconvinced she notes that the pot clubs put their identities in a database. When they visit a club their driver's license is recorded. She adds, "Your wives will have a field day with that information when they divorce you" ("Good Shit Lollipop"). The men are visibly worried, particularly Doug, because he serves on city council. This leads her accountant to suggest that she open a bakery as her "front business" to funnel her drug profits into a legitimate account.

The first season ends with a meeting in Nancy's pergola. She has gathered Doug, the account, Dean, the attorney, Alejandro, a fellow drug dealer, Sanjay, her current employee, and Conrad, a former seller with aspirations of being a marijuana grower. She tells them that at the table they have finance, legal, distribution, and sales departments. Together they can open a "grow house," where Conrad will produce the marijuana that she and her employees can sell. She is cutting out the need for a supplier, allowing her to run her own marijuana empire in her area. The first season ends with the audience seeing Nancy well on her way to becoming a Self-Made Woman, possessing entrepreneurial success, where she is her own boss and controls the operation of her business, albeit an illegal one.

Another television series that centers on an unexpected drug dealer is *Breaking Bad*. The series takes its title from "a Southern expression, meaning going bad after a life of clean living" (Strachan, "Breaking Bad is so good it's back"). Walter White is an average, middle-aged, white man and high school chemistry teacher. Upon learning that he has terminal cancer, White has to find a way to provide for the future of his family, which consists of a pregnant wife and a teenaged son living with cerebral palsy. He decides to make and sell crystal meth. White's

decision mirrors that of young hustlers in many ways, in that, he is left feeling that there are few options available for him to "make it" in America. He, like the "hustler," uses the skills and abilities he possesses to create a new path for himself. "Hustlers," not having formal educations, must use what they learned from street life to succeed in the legal business world. White inverts the situation by using his formal education to make it in the drug game, as he uses "his training to become a chemical millionaire - by becoming the best maker of meth in all of New Mexico" (Stasi, "Tour De Pants"). What is particularly unsettling about this scenario is that White is a white, college-educated man who is giving back to society by educating its youth. His situation demonstrates the anxiety, frustration, and anger felt by many middle-class Americans that struggle to make ends meet and pay health bills. White initially is working part-time at a car wash to make ends meet because his $43,000 a year teaching salary does not cover his living and family's medical expenses. When left with no legal options Walter White ultimately transforms into a Hustler.

Many of the themes found in *Weeds* can also be found in *Breaking Bad,* but the latter differs in that the main character has the skills and abilities that should ensure gainful, legitimate employment. Walter White represents a life of unfulfilled potential. He is an extremely intelligent and gifted chemist that is constantly disrespected and belittled by his family, students, and boss at the carwash. This treatment is made all the more insulting when during the pilot episode the camera scans to a plaque that reads,

Science Research Center Los Almos, New Mexico

Recognizes Walter H. White

Crystallography Project Leader for Proton Radiography

Contributor to Research Awarded Nobel Prize ("Pilot")

This plaque is dated 1985 and illustrates that Walter's success occurred when he was a young man not yet thirty years old. This fact exacerbates the ridicule and shame he must endure on a daily basis.

Walter's mind, his greatest asset, is wasted and mocked. First, we see Walter speaking to a group of high school students in a chemistry class. He is giving an engaging lecture, discussing how chemistry is not just about the study of matter but also it is the study of change. His enthusiasm and passion is obvious. Yet, he is distracted by a disrespectful student that is flirting with a female classmate. When Walter asks him, "Chad, is there something wrong with your table?" and motions him to return to his spot, the student glares and drags his chair loudly across the floor disrupting the lecture. After school that day Walter is seen working the cash register at the carwash. The owner comes out and tells Walter he is short staffed and Walter must wash the cars rather than take customers' money. Walter is then seen in his professional attire cleaning cars and is caught by his student Chad who proceeds to record a video of him cleaning the car using his cell phone. The day ends with his arriving home to a surprise party for his fiftieth birthday. There he is berated by his brother-in-law, a D.E.A. agent, for not being man enough to hold a gun, and he says, "You have a brain the size of Wisconsin but we won't hold that against you" ("Pilot"). He laughs at Walter in much the way a football player would laugh at a nerd in a teen movie.

Walter's financial problems are evidenced throughout the first episode. Not only is Walter working a second job, when he faints at the carwash he tells the E.M.T. in the ambulance to just drop him off at the corner, and when the E.M.T. refuses he says, "It's just I don't have the greatest insurance" ("Pilot"). Here again, *Breaking Bad* implies that the problems with the American healthcare system are a factor contributing to Americans' felt financial strain. This

incident also illustrates that having insurance often does not allow individuals to afford adequate healthcare. Once he returns home from being given the diagnosis that he has inoperable lung cancer, he finds his wife on the phone with a credit card company. She asks, "Did you use the Mastercard at Staples for $15.88 last month?" ("Pilot"). Walter responds "Yeah, I needed printer paper" ("Pilot). She admonishes him that the MasterCard is the card they do not use. This scene is one that many Americans are able to relate to, in that, often they find themselves in a situation where their checking account and budget will not allow for a sixteen dollar purchase, and they must resort to credit cards to cover their necessities.

Upon learning of his cancer Walter is emboldened to contact his brother-in-law to go on a drug bust with him, but Walter is only interested in going because he wants to see a methamphetamine laboratory. Sitting in the car during the raid of the house containing the meth lab, he notices a former student of his, Jesse Pinkman, escaping from a neighboring house. Walter later goes to Jesse's house and coerces him into partnering with him to make and sell methamphetamine. As the two proceed Jesse wants to know if Walter is "crazy or depressed" and Walter says, "I'm awake." It seems that what Walter is awake to is the world he was numb to before. He realizes what his options are in this world to provide for his family. He faces a similar choice to that of the young Hustler in urban America. Recall from chapter four one of the common sentiments of young, black, urban men is that they believe they will die young. Walter too faces certain death and is emboldened by this fact. With no other way to ensure his family's survival after his passing, he decides to use his knowledge of chemistry to become a Hustler.

These examples all feature white Americans becoming Hustlers. It should be noted that films and television series that feature Hustlers arguably reflect more of a fantasy than a reality

for many of the viewers. While many Americans can identify with these struggles many will not become drug dealers. The Hustler sensibility can also provide an individual a way to resolve their frustration in a way that is cathartic. It is important to note that not all audiences view this adoption of the Hustler sensibility as a necessary means of survival as much as a way to escape the frustrating and depressing aspects of their life via fantasy. In summary, the Hustler sensibility is articulated to various domains and audiences, but this sensibility is enacted in different ways and serves different purposes for different audiences.

Guerilla Knitters: Yarn bombing, Cultural Appropriation or Hustler Resistance?

Bombing, in graffiti terminology, refers to an individual or graffiti crew covering a particular area in graffiti tags. Graffiti began as a way to meet artistic and political needs. Recall from chapter four that this art form is particular to and originates in hip hop culture. Oftentimes graffiti art appears in highly visible spaces, such as subway stations or billboards, but it is also used to make beautiful and useful again those spaces that have fallen to urban decay.

Magda Sayeg was a dress shop owner in Austin, Texas. Bored one day she knitted what looked like a little sweater for the handle of her shop. Many people stopped in to comment on the piece of craft art. This piece, entitled by Sayeg, is now known as "alpha" and it is considered by many to be the birth of yarn bombing in America.

When Sayeg witnessed the response of her community to the door handle cover she became inspired to use knitting and crocheting as a form of graffiti. She formed a graffiti crew of fellow knitters and they used the crew name Knitta Please (borrowing from the common expression, "Nigga Please"). Sayeg used the street name PolyCotN and others were P-Knitty, The Knotorious NIT, and MascuKnitty. These pseudonyms are obviously clever spins on hip hop lingo and rap artists' names. One needs to pause to consider if this is all tongue-in-cheek

fun or is it an irresponsible appropriation of hip hop culture. Is yarn bombing another example of white America colonizing and putting black culture to work in ways that robs the art form of its original meaning and significance? Before addressing this, it is necessary to consider the motivations of knit bombers.

It is arguable that yarn bombing in many ways began as a kind of release valve for creative frustrations. There are also feminist undertones to the political statements being made by some of these demonstrations and displays. Carol Zou, current leader of Yarn Bombing L.A., says that knit bombing is in many ways a reaction to the overt sexism prominent in street art culture (Vankin, "Culture Monsters"). Knit bombing then is a way to bring attention to not only female street artists, but also a way to bring attention and value to a conventional type of "woman's work." Zou states, "Craft is something men practice, but it's traditionally associated with being feminine and activities that keep women inside the home. By putting craft out in the public, we're challenging the history of craft as well as the culture of street art that has a lot of embedded sexism" (Vankin, "Culture Monsters"). Yarn bombing is also a way to bring value to knitting and crocheting, and other forms of crafting, as a kind of legitimate art, since they are overshadowed or disparaged by the fine art community. For Carol Zou the mission of Yarn Bombing L.A. is also about challenging and disrupting notions of "artistic identities."

Another motivation for yarn bombing is a citizen's attempt to take ownership of the space in which they live. Vankin quotes Zou: "'The unifying thread,'" Zou says, laughing at her pun, 'is the idea of a landscape being an open work that people contribute to and continually reshape, whether it be the forest, the sea or the built environment.'" An example of a taking over of one's environment is evidenced by a group of mostly female, middle-aged, suburban dwellers that decide to engage in what they term the "Brooklynization of Brookland" in the fall of 2013.

Brookland is an area of Washington D.C. that is changing. Artists, dancers, and musicians are moving into this space. This group of women used yarn bombing as a way to announce to the community that "the creative class is coming" (Samuels, "Yarn-bombing project hopes to bridge divide in a changing Brookland"). These D.C. women do demonstrate a kind of hip hop sensibility, in that they have embraced what could seem to be contradictive about their identities – white, suburban, bohemian, graffiti artists – and perform and live these contradictions in a way that gives them a sense of agency and liberation.

Ultimately, yarn bombing can be viewed as guerrilla art in that it does seek to be disruptive. The art form challenges sexism and the centrality of masculinity. Yarn bombers demonstrate that women, using a supremely womanly artform, can be players in the game of street art, and that women can take over and rework public spaces that have traditionally been conceived of as masculine (public) spaces. These activists and participants also disrupt notions of what constitutes real art since yarn bombing, like graffiti, has now began to make its way into the fine art world via gallery installations and the growing fame and recognition of Magda Sayeg. More than anything yarn bombing disrupts how the public is to understand the identity of those that knit.

In 2009, Mandy Moore and Leanne Prain published *Yarn Bombing: The Art of Crochet and Knit Graffiti*. This coffee table book serves as part manifesto of yarn bombers and part tutorial. Using the vernacular of street graffiti the authors urge knitters to parody urban graffiti artists by engaging in an illegal and illicit alternative to making another Christmas sweater since it is up to them to "take back the knit" (Wollan, "Graffiti's Cozy).

There are varying degrees of subversive and political impulses that motivate those engaged in the activity. It is also questionable if all yarn bombers are really activists, or rather

merely participants engaging in what feels like an en vogue and exciting activity that makes life less mundane. There is a wide range of individuals in this community ranging from highly politicized groups like the San Antonio Yarn Dawgz,[4] to stitch circles that decide to decorate a tree in the park.

There are some interesting similarities between yarn bombing and the Hustler sensibility. Magda Sayeg has a very similar story to the Hustler. She was once a single mother of three, a welfare recipient, and struggling to make ends meet. Her *techne*, an actual form of craftiness, allowed her to garner financial success and fame. The Hustler uses drug dealing and lyrical talent, while Sayeg used her ability to knit and produce public art demonstrations. Sayeg is no longer a rogue street artist, but is rather a commissioned professional being contracted by Fortune 500 companies for up to twenty thousand dollars per project (Wollan, "Graffiti's Cozy"). The artist quoted in a *New York Times* article speaks to the shift in identity her fame has brought, "In the early years I identified with underground graffiti artists... Now the very people I feared I would be in trouble with are the ones inviting me to do this work for them" (Wollan, "Graffiti's Cozy").

There is a fine line one walks when adopting the Hustler sensibility or identifying with hip hop culture. The differences between yarn bombing and graffiti art leaves one to ponder the ethics, or perhaps even well-intentioned but racist impulses, behind the adaption of the culture and vernacular of hip hop. The differences between traditional graffiti art and yarn bombing are important and should be noted. The bodies of the members of both communities are marked in significant ways. Graffiti artists are typically young, male, urban, and black or Latino. Yarn

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[4] The Yarn Dawgz are three men that engage in various political activities such as yarn bombing to producing and performing in a hip hop musical the group wrote.

bombers are typically of varied ages, white, middle-class, and female. The motivations of both groups can at times be very closely aligned or very far apart. Graffiti artists seek to alter a space that reflects economic and social disparities. Tags on abandoned buildings draw the attention to feelings of being forgotten or cast off by society while simultaneously taking ownership of the space, making it beautiful and adding a sense of pride to the community from which you come. The spaces of yarn bomb graffiti are usually communicating a variation on this theme. The yarn bomber typically communicates that "this space belongs to me and I have the privilege to make it beautiful." For example, the legal repercussions for graffiti versus yarn bombing are very different. Part of this has to do with the fact that knitted tags are far easier to remove than painted graffiti tags. There is also a question about how illegal exactly yarn bombing really is. People publicly promote and organize yarn bombings with no real concern for legal consequences because if caught there is a slim chance of prosecution. While it can be argued that the mark of the Hustler on the cultural, social, economic, and political consciousness of America is undeniable, individuals do well to remember the conjuncture from which he emerged and be attentive and respectful of that.

Conclusion – The Hustler as a Twenty-First Century Self-Made Man

The Hustler is a new mode of black masculinity and his sensibility of rule-breaking can be a desirable sensibility for uptake in America. One of the primary reasons that this sensibility gains traction is because of current contestations over American identity, and also the general loss of faith in grand narratives. The American dream, as it has historically been envisioned, no longer seems realistic to many Americans. The Hustler, as the new incarnation of the dream, proves more applicable in the twenty-first century. The shift that this has created in the affective

regime of many Americans is evidenced by popular film, television, and art, to name just a few examples explored in this chapter.

The *doxa* of the United States, its tenets of the Self-Made Man, the narrative that grew out of it– the American dream, and its primary figure – the white masculine subject – have all been destabilized. Some members of the nation are anxious and searching for a more sensical and truthful *doxa*. These individuals many embrace hip hop culture, the Hustler figure, and his sensibility. His arrival was permitted because of ubiquitous uncertainty. When our master narratives are dethroned, a new sense-making system is not only possible, but desired. As the Hustler recounts his frustration and anger with a system rigged for his failure, many Americans began to nod their heads to more than an infectious hip hop beat. The lyrics, the Hustler's story, resonate with an unanticipated audience. The hip hop audience became the broader one of individuals facing their own version of disillusionment with the nation, and its long cherished narratives and promises that all feel like lies. The Hustler is the twenty-first century success story and iconic national hero because he is beloved more for the harsh realities he dares to confront than feel-good fairytales centered on a dream that can only come true for the few and far between.

Chapter 6 "Reflections on Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research Questions"

Introduction

This dissertation began with an investigation into representations of American identity and contestations over them. This led to my argument that the figure of the Hustler, as constituted by his performances and texts, emerges because of the contestations over American identity. As the nation loses its ability to agree upon a shared *doxa,* or rather it is no longer possible for a certain *doxa* to maintain its hegemonic power, the improbable may emerge and circulate. When there is a lack of shared values and beliefs, common sense loses the ability to constrain discourses and performances. This is when the improbable becomes permissible and even desirable. Many Americans are looking for new sense-making systems that seem more applicable and consistent with a twenty-first century America. When the conventional *doxa* no longer seems sensical, the battle and negotiation over how we are to make sense of the world ensues.

The appearance of such figures as the Hustler is also indicative of rhetorical critics' need to consider improbable rhetorics. This conception of rhetoric has to be part of the critic's "tool kit" so to speak, in that it has to be recognized as a possible way to read and account for a rhetorical text. The Hustler clearly demonstrates that you cannot predict or control rhetorical effect. The Hustler most likely did not originally intend for his rhetoric to span so many domains, but it did. If a critic were not aware of this outcome the Hustler could be easily misread, he could be miscast as something less unique and significant, and there is a whole series of effects that could be overlooked. In short, rhetorical critics would not be able to have as rich of a read and understanding of a rhetorical phenomenon. Drawing on a theorist such as Grossberg allows a critic to account for the constitution of domains. This is important for critics

because it allows them to reference the larger grid of intelligibility within which the text emerges. Moreover, Grossberg accounts for the potential of improbable texts with his theorizations of disembedded constituting logics of each domain, of contexts as vectors that can align in surprising ways, and finally the theory of uptake, which shows that texts have the ability to impact unintended and unexpected audiences in surprising ways.

Limitations of Project

There are many issues worthy of note when studying hip hop texts and culture, and the scope of this project did not allow, nor necessarily require, that I speak to all of them. Hip hop is seen as a progressive social movement by some and a glorification of stereotypes that harms the black community by others. It is not so simple as "good" or "bad," and although I do not have the space to go deeply into the positive and negative aspects of hip hop, I do want to address some of them before closing the dissertation.

First, I will address some of the negative criticism. While there is merit to some of these claims, it is important to remember that hip hop is a complex formation that is constantly producing texts, discourses, and images that are varied, layered, and polysemic. Hip hop can never be considered in completely positive or negative terms because, like all discourse, it possesses the ability to do, and to be, a variety of things all at once; to inform and be informed by multiple contexts.

Most scholars, who feel unease about hip hop, its influence, and ability to produce representations of black America, assert it has become a mainstream art and commodity, because it is a modern iteration of black minstrel shows (hooks 152; Neal 15). In being nothing more than a minstrel show hip hop becomes, "an imitation of dominator desire, not a rearticulation, not a radical alternative" (hooks 152). In addition to being a minstrel show, it is also argued that hip

hop revives and perpetuates other negative constructions of black masculinity, such as the "Buck." This characterization is viewed as conflating a "gansta" ethos or "thug life" with maintaining one's authenticity and credibility with the black community; this worldview also tends to promote sexism and homophobia within the black community (Jackson 107-109). Another effect of the "gansta" or "thug" image is that is can narrowly define black communities as poor and overrun by crime, and this in effect reinforces many binary oppositions that have historically existed between white and black Americans, in which middle-class status and suburban living becomes associated with whiteness (Ogbar 39). These conceptions all coalescence, resulting in hip hop being characterized as a dangerous phenomenon that degrades morality, and could ultimately lead to corrupting youth and the future of American prosperity (Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars* 96-98). The focus on individual success that the Hustler sensibility promotes also dismisses and discourages the importance and necessity of collective social action to bring about social change in society. In short, the focus is on the betterment of the individual's life rather than the community from which they hail.

Hip hop has arguably added to America's negative understandings of black masculinity. Identifying young black males as "thugs" is consistent with a "liberal discourse of pathology and victimhood, cultural failure and social dysfunction" (Harris 14). Visibly and frequently reasserting images of black men that recast them as violent and criminal leave black men few options, facing a dichotomy where they must either embody these stereotypes or seek to be something characterized as assimilationist. That is, black men must attempt to embody a subject-position that is understood to be primarily a white one (hooks xii). This construction can be a dangerous one, especially for black urban youth, because it promotes a hustler lifestyle as

the only viable option for them. This is misleading because very few individuals gain the success of the Hustler.

When accounting for the effects of the stereotypes produced and circulated by hip hop it is also important to consider, not only how the subconscious of black Americans is affected, but that of non-blacks as well. Tricia Rose explains that we must consider the desires of white fans to consume destructive stereotypes of black America, especially when these discursive and visual representations are perceived as "authentically black" (*The Hip Hop Wars* 228). Rose fears that if a historical account of racism and white privilege is not accounted for then what can appear to be the fostering of racial unity and equity, can actually produce the opposite effect (*The Hip Hop Wars* 228). In many ways fans get to experience the thrill of being granted access, or at the very least feel a proximity, to a "form of social danger" while maintaining a safe distance from the "object of fascination" (Smith 85). Some of the appeal also is that people are comfortable with stereotypes in that they do not challenge traditional logics or, as hooks asserts, there is a comfort for some whites in black men remaining "savages unable to rise above their animal nature," they can "actually be viewed as less of a threat because savages are contained in ways that are more justifiable" (hooks xii-xiii)

It should be noted that black men, and black Americans in general, have not idly participated in these historical characterizations, and that hip hop also contains messages refuting the characterizations described above. Counter-narratives of black masculinity have always existed, such as W.E.B. DuBois' the "talented tenth" and Alain Locke's creation of "the new negro" (Neal 15). In more contemporary times, the most common counter-narrative is that of the "Strong Black Man." While positive in some ways, it too can be limiting because it creates yet another form of policing where if one falls too far outside the purview of this characterization

then black men are faulted for not being strong, black, or man enough (Neal 27). Another contemporary mode of black masculinity that resides in more "vernacular discourse" is that of "cool pose" that celebrates a particular notion of authentic black masculinity, but this type of performativity is also susceptible to criticism for being "shot through with racialism" that promotes stereotypes that these counter-narratives seek to refute (Harris 114). While counter-narratives and notions of black masculine performativity are useful in deconstructing essentialist notions of black male identity, they must "provide a space for meaningful resistance of oppressive systems" if they are to be truly useful (Johnson 9). Despite the valid criticisms, hip hop does provide a space for meaningful resistance, in that it produces a new mode of black masculinity in the form of the hip hop "hustler."

In addition, rap has also become one of the main ways in which we can talk about race in American culture, and this includes exploring what hip hop comes to represent, challenge, and reinforce (Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars* 227). Race and class are so central to the themes and narratives of hip hop that an acknowledgement of these issues is in many ways inescapable. When listening to rap music it is arguably hard for one to not take a moment to pause to consider the standpoint of the life story from which it originates.

Hip hop creates a space where black masculinity is visible and not controlled or policed by traditional white standards of acceptability. Patricia Hill-Collins asserts hip hop is a space where black men are able to truly embody adulthood as they cast off the "traditional boy status reserved for Black men" (191). By not pursuing white acceptance a new path is forged, and a new "way to be Black, male, and adult" becomes realized (Hill-Collins 191). When black men become fully black, male, and adult a decentering of white centrality occurs because the binary

opposition that prescribes white and black masculinity, in an interconnected way, loses its sense-making function and legitimacy.

Another positive dimension of hip hop is that it has changed our cultural, political, and economic landscape. Hip hop has forced the populace, and arguably the world, to take notice of black men in unprecedented ways. This visibility raises the profile and notability of all black men, a profile that spans other arenas such as athletics and politics. Hopkins and Moore argue that we now live in an era where "black talents are celebrated and worshipped on an international stage" and this is largely because of the possibilities that are created via the visibility of black men that hip hop has fostered (71).

In other words, it is important to understand hip hop as a phenomenon that is not easily reduced to the mere promotion and embodiment of stereotypes. Although riddled with messages that possess the potential to promote violence and negative images of urban youth it is also a space where young, oppressed black males have a voice. Patricia Hill-Collins writes,

> Yet the depiction of thug life in hip-hop remains one of the few places Black poor and working-class men can share their view of the world in public. Raps about drugs, crime, prison, prostitution, child abandonment, and early death may seem fabricated, but these social problems are also a way of life for far too many Black youth. (159)

Another serious criticism of hip hop that this project does not address is the overt sexism and misogyny that exists within the culture. While there are feminist voices within the hip hop community, there is also a great deal of violent sexism. Referring to women as bitches, prostitutes, or strippers, or as existing solely for the sexual pleasure of a man is unfortunately a common motif in many rappers' lyrics. Rap music videos are also notorious for featuring

women in a highly objectified and sexualized manner. The effects of such portrayals have been widely studied and should continue to be interrogated.

Directions for Future Research

This project opens a space for several future areas, including scholarly inquiries into race, masculinity, and national identity. In addition, it is my hope that rhetorical theory and criticism would benefit from my assertion that the field needs to continue to consider the possibility of improbable texts, and that our theories and approaches to criticism must respond to the unique nature of these kinds of texts. In what follows I describe directions for future research.

First, my dissertation suggests further lines of investigation into how the Hustler, and the emergence of this new mode of black masculine performativity, have shifted logics constituting fields of discourse. For example, now that black masculinity is conceived of differently, must we, or how must we, conceive of other subject-positions in a new way? I have examined how the Hustler challenges constructions of white masculinity but there are other subject-positions that still require exploration: how, for example, does the Hustler change or inform the ways that we might understand black femininity? Similarly, how does the figure of the Hustler reconfigure how Americans view our past? The tropes of black masculinity such as Sambo, Uncle Tom, and the Buck might become even less tenable now that the Hustler has exposed the history of systemic oppression experienced by black Americans.

Second, this project contributes to understandings of the function of race in America. One of the most powerful and pervasive rhetorical constructions that has ordered American society since its inception is the construction of race. Racializing an Other has long served as a justification for inequity in the distributions of rights and opportunities in the United States. Hip hop is providing a discursive space for Americans to explore and discuss race and race relations

in the United States. The ways in which the Hustler is informing conversations about race in the United States is a rich area of inquiry that requires further exploration.

Third, this project points to the intersection of masculinity and national identity in the United States. Historically national identity and the representations of the ideal citizen-subject have been masculine and white. However, masculinity in America is in a state of crisis. Factors such as an increase in gender equality, the changing nature of the workforce, and the visibility and increasing acceptance of the LBGTQ community disrupts conventional notions of masculinity. As the assumed primary representation of national identity, the white, masculine subject, loses its hegemony, how will understandings of the citizen-subject change?

Fourth, this project contributes to a much larger endeavor being conducted across disciplines and that is an examination of the public discourses vying to define what it means to be American. This project looked at one such discourse. But much remains to be investigated as to how this discourse is acting with or against other complementary or competing discourses. How does the sensibility associated with the Hustler aid or detract from the authority of other discourses? One issue to consider is that the Hustler is not the image of the Self-Made Man for all Americans. Take, for example, the men interviewed in Kimmel's *Angry White Men* that I discuss in chapter five. These men would not consider the Hustler a figure that they could identify with. What their particular notion of the Self-Made Man is, and what type of sensibility this produces, is a very significant rhetorical investigation. Explorations such as these provide insight into why there is difficulty forming a sense of collectivity among the populace. These varying, competing paradigms reveal why Americans find it difficult to create a shared vision of the nation and what it means to be American.   Explorations along these lines might continue to explore the other ways in which various sensibilities are articulated across different discursive

spaces, and what rhetorical strategies are used to counter or undermine the spread of these sensibilities. What are the values, beliefs, and logics at work encouraging or resisting the spread, or resistance, of the Hustler sensibility, and what do they reveal about their promoters and their various competing national sensibilities?

Finally, this project seeks to open a discussion in the field of rhetoric about which theories and modes of criticism are appropriate when encountering improbable texts. I encourage others to explore the utility of adopting Lawrence Grossberg's approach to rhetoric that I have used in this dissertation. A second area of discussion this project contributes to within the field of rhetoric is accounting for the production and function of affect in the rhetorical process. Rhetoricians exploring other theories and conceptualizations of affect may well find additional ways to account for its functions, such as the formation of an affective regime.

Of course this dissertation is not the last word on representations of American identity. As I hope I have shown here, when seen as rhetorical constructions, the persona and performances of the Hustler help illuminate how we understand national identity, the current constitution of discursive fields, and an expanded conception of rhetoric. The Hustler, and similar rhetorical constructions, are rich sources of rhetorical investigation that should continue to occupy the rhetorical critic.

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ABSTRACT

**THE RHETORIC OF THE HIP HOP HUSTLER: SHIFTING REPRESENTATIONS OF
AMERICAN IDENTITY**

by

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Major: Communication

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

The nature of American identity is highly contested in the twenty-first century. This dissertation seeks to understand how this state of uncertainty produces a rhetorical opening for new and unimagined rhetorical possibilities. As citizens lose faith in the narratives that have defined national identity, the populace becomes open to a new narrative and a new figure to represent American identity. I argue that the hip hop mogul, or what I label the Hustler, seizes this rhetorical opportunity to rewrite the narrative of the Self-Made Man, a narrative that has historically been figured as white and masculine. The Self-Made Man is important to understandings of American identity because this figure has come to represent the ideal citizen-subject. To accurately account for the rhetorical force of the Hustler, this dissertation proposes that the field of rhetoric consider a theory that accounts for improbable rhetorical texts and performances. I turn to the theories developed by Lawrence Grossberg to identify the conditions that give rise to the improbable rhetorical texts of the Hustler. Using Grossberg's approach of conjunctural analysis, and applying his theory of embedded/disembedded domains, I account for the Hustler's emergence and the rhetorical strategies he employs. I illustrate this exploration with a thematic analysis of *Decoded*, the autobiography of Jay-Z, an exemplar Hustler. I argue

that the Hustler is a significant rhetorical figure, in that he produces and performs a new mode of black masculinity that is unlike seen previously in the popular American imagination. This mode of black masculinity disrupts and shifts long held governing logics that have ordered notions of race in America. By recasting the Self-Made Man, as black, and thereby also proposing a new view of the United States, the Hustler produces a new sensibility of achieving success in America. The traveling of this new Hustler sensibility to unintended and unimagined audiences illustrates, not only the impact of the Hustler on American identity, but also, points to why a theory that accounts for improbable rhetorics is needed by the field.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Marylou R. Naumoff's focus is contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism, employing a theoretical orientation informed by critical/cultural and feminist studies. The primary focus of her work is to understand the ways rhetoric informs and shapes American identity. She seeks to interrogate constructions of identity in ways that asks more than what a particular representation produces or forecloses. Her work explores the intersection of contexts, while also considering the discursive, cultural, and social conditions that meet to produce the text that make such a representation possible. In future research Naumoff will continue to examine the changing nature of American identity particularly in relation to constructions of masculinity. Given that the ideal citizen-subject has historically been conceived of as male, this particular subject position is an interesting and rich source of rhetorical investigation.

Marylou R. Naumoff received her BA (2000) and MA (2003) in Communication from the University of Cincinnati. She completed her PhD in Communication, with a focus in Rhetoric, in 2014. Her dissertation is titled, *The Rhetoric of the Hip Hop Hustler: Shifting Representations of American Identity.*