I, Derrick J Jenkins Sr., hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies.

It is entitled:
Hip Hop Activism in Education: The Historical Efforts of Hip Hop Congress to Advance Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy through the Urban Teachers Network

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HIP HOP ACTIVISM IN EDUCATION:
THE HISTORICAL EFFORTS OF HIP HOP CONGRESS TO ADVANCE CRITICAL HIP HOP PEDAGOGY
THROUGH URBAN TEACHERS NETWORK

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ABSTRACT

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JUNE 2012

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Hip Hop culture has been an influential force on the social fabric of the United States and abroad for nearly forty years (Rose, 1994 & 2008; Dyson, 2007; Light, 2005). Its praxis as an agent of social change has been inextricably connected to movements of empowerment for countless youth who embrace hip hop (Bynoe, 2004; Chang, 2004; Kitwana, 2002). This study explores its Afro-Diasporic, activist origins, and the origins of activist organization Hip Hop Congress, as well as the theoretical impact of hip hop culture on the identity and pedagogy of educators affiliated with the Urban Teachers Network. Currently, hip hop education is being taught in nearly every discipline and subject in the K-16 pipeline (Duncan & Morrell, 2008), with very little assessment of its effect on student performance and equally limited analysis of educator’s role of its implementation. The results of this study will acknowledge the efforts of the Urban Teachers Network to connect educators who utilize hip hop pedagogy and evaluate the effect of their efforts while chronicling the activist role of Hip Hop Congress.
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my two knuckleheads, Derrick “Shubby” Jenkins, Jr. and Aniya “Na Na Papaya” Jenkins. This document should stand as a constant and nagging reminder that after three jobs, nearly seven years and countless doubters, not trying and furthermore failure is not an option. I love you with my whole heart. This is for you! Also, this is dedicated to my wise and longsuffering mother. You’ve instilled the love of knowledge and perseverance against any odds to accomplish what some said was not accomplishable. And even though I have disappointed you with some of my actions, I am still your son whom you loved and nurtured into a scholar activist. You are my heart! This is also dedicated to my Pa Pa and Granny Jenkins who would always after a hug upon greeting, question my siblings and I about our grades, subconsciously forcing me to do my best in school as a child. Lastly, and most certainly not least, this is for my Aunt Wanda and Uncle James, for loving us when at times I felt very few did and could. Your Big Fella did it! Pa Pa, Granny, Granmommy, Aunt Wanda and Uncle James, may God continue to give you rest.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE CRISIS OF URBAN EDUCATION

Research has shown that the American public has become more dissatisfied with educational institutions here in the U.S. (Johnson & Immerwahr, 1994) since the 1990s. From its world standing to its grim academic predicted outcomes on the current generation, the prognosis shows a tremendous failure of public education. Those affected most by this free fall in academic progress have historically been Blacks, Latinos and poor whites (Anderson, 2001) – the most vulnerable and marginalized in U.S. society. While the number of Blacks and other disenfranchised groups continue to increase or remain consistently high, “blacks and others are still faced with the mitigating problems of disproportionate interface with criminal justice system, unorganized/disenfranchised communities, and major socio-educational problems, such as, a mismatch between Black culture and the culture of schools” (Shockley, 2007, p. 1). Many scholars such as Murrell (2002) posit that considering alternative educational reform measures such as the utilization of popular culture and culturally responsive pedagogies will assist in the reengagement of marginalized groups within the educational process.

The numbers are staggering in painting a grim portrait of a once proud and productive educational system existing on life support here in the United States of America. According to the latest Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) international student assessment report for 2010, the US has fallen significantly behind many countries in Math, Reading and Science. In an evaluation of knowledge and skill sets of 15 year-old students from 70 countries, the U.S. ranks a disappointing 14th in reading, 17th in science, and an abysmal
25th in math out of 34 countries in these categories (OECD, 2010). In an interview with the Associated Press, Arne Duncan, the U.S. Education Secretary, is quoted as saying: “The results are extraordinarily challenging to us and we have to deal with the brutal truth. We have to get much more serious about investing in education” (Huffington Post, December 7, 2010). As education worsened in the latter part of the 20th century, an ominous report called the Coleman Report was submitted by the U.S. Department of Commerce in 1966, which foreshadowed the impending decline of U.S. education. The report, which was facilitated by the exposed inequalities within education in America due in part to the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement, decried the perils of the widening gaps in education between low-income minorities in urban communities and their more affluent counterparts.

Today we see the aftermath of a persistent inequality unchecked and virtually unnoticed. The statistics show a nation of the underrepresented reeling from a lack of resources and unyielding systemic miseducation in the public school sector. One statistic given by the 2010 NCES (2010) report shows that the number of impoverished public schools in America increased 5 percentage points between the years of 2000-2007, from 12 to 17 percent. Elementary schools in America reflect even more damning evidence of the long-waged war of abandonment on our nation’s most vulnerable population, with a fifth of all public schools listed under the ominous tag of high poverty. According to the same report, Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans are more likely to be enrolled in a high poverty school than Whites and Asian American/Pacific Islanders. High poverty schools are labeled by the number of children eligible for free lunch, typically between 75 to 100 percent of students. Blacks and Hispanics comprise the highest percentages of students in high poverty elementary and secondary
schools in urban and rural American communities (44 and 34 percent, respectively). In the same aforementioned schools, 75 percent recorded at least one or more serious violent incident or crime such as theft or other incidents. This trend has direct negative consequences for poverty, crime and economic conditions in the U.S.

The educational outcomes foreshadow less than favorable scholastic attainment for the young subjected to the ravishing reality of both poverty and violence within their educational relegation. Since 2000, graduation rates for students from high poverty schools have declined an alarming 18 percent in 8 years, while the rates for their counterparts have remained static. Since 2000, graduation rates for seniors in schools labeled high poverty decreased by 18 percent, from 86 percent to 68 percent. There was no statistical difference in graduation rates in low poverty schools during the same period. This reality reflects the widening gaps between the high poverty and low poverty schools and directly and disproportionately affects African Americans and other ethnic groups. Many alternative educational practices have been suggested to stem the overwhelming tide of miseducation through inequitable practices within the classroom. According to the Broad Foundation (2010), approximately 1.1 million American high school students drop out each year, costing the U.S. 192 billion in lost income and taxes.

Due in large part to the historical positioning of many ethnic groups, blacks in particular who occupy the bottom rung of educational achievement in American society, it can be argued that radical and non-traditional approaches to leveraging deliverable based practices for those students most affected is needed. A growing number of scholars studying these trends of failure and utter disconnect now suggest that there is a need for culturally imbued education
within the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Murrell, 2002; Shujaa, 1993). The aforementioned scholars base their rationale on the necessity of culturally-responsive pedagogy around the belief that black and other ethnic children will not be able to compete on the global stage without a radically re-conceptualized educational platform. It is hypothesized that education for blacks and others cannot successfully fortify them and validate their shared experience without there being a measure of reflexivity highlighted within the pedagogy and curricula (Anderson, 2001).

In addition, it is suggested by scholars such as Daniel Noguera (2011) and A. A. Akom that if students are not actively involved with the reformation of education, then it will not be as effective. When students are given the tools to assess their own problems and engage in resolution-based learning that is germane to their experience and world views, they are more likely to “engage in civil society in ways that hold schools, institutions, and politicians accountable to their interest” (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2011). Mediratta, Cohen, and Shah (2007), in the article Leveraging Reform: Youth Power in a Smart Education System, assert that youth are increasingly becoming the largest proponents of community-organized reform that is leading to significant improvement in the educational system. Hip hop-based education is a large impetus in the youth-led movement for equity in education.

Hip hop education, a fairly new concept and still in its infancy, shows great promise as praxis when coupled with traditional curricula (Akom, 2009). The strength of hip hop within the classroom draws on the ability to pedagogically utilize the experiences and worldview of the student to enhance learning (Runell and Diaz, 2007). In addition to student buy-in, teachers are
invited into the lives and stories of their students to foster deeper engagement of student-teacher interaction, leading to more robust interaction and holistic education and improved school environment (Duncan-Andrade and Murrell, 2008; Hill, 2009). Stating beyond the scholastic attainment potentiated by hip hop lessons within the classroom, student engagement will lead to greater attrition rates and raised test scores and improved graduation rates (PENCIL, 2011). This project is an effort towards displaying the usefulness of hip hop education as a platform of pedagogical reform.
CHAPTER 2

ELEMENTS OF HIP HOP CULTURE

“Is hip hop just a euphemism for a new religion?
The soul music for the slaves that the youth is missing
This is more than just my road to redemption.”
(Kanye West, 2011)

A. Introduction

“When did you fall in love with hip hop?” This is a question asked as a revolving tag line from the highly acclaimed cinematic hip hop cult classic love story “Brown Sugar” released in 2002. As the movie begins, this question is posed by the main character as a lead-in narration, subsequently cueing past and present legendary hip hop artists, enthusiastically excerpting their earliest and fondest memories of encountering hip hop culture. This early segment of the movie not only lends credibility to the movie’s intention to engage in dialogue related to the past, present, and future of hip hop through a fictitious love story of young hip hop heads turned hip hop power brokers, it also infectiously causes the viewers to engross themselves, if only for a moment, on the question “when did you fall in love with hip hop?”

To many, this question is a lot more complex than its surface inquiry notes. This question deals with primary engagement with the music and the culture. To many, this question is associated with one’s view on the music and the culture, past or present, considering that there is an increasing number of those who are repulsed by the current state of the music and culture and profess not to love hip hop any longer. To others, this question is a retrospective glance back at a cultural force that changed their lives while simultaneously acting as a guide through some of lives’ benchmarks, or maybe a soundtrack leading to present
thought. The complexity of this simplistically stated question will, if one grew up with even a peripheral connection to hip hop, evoke some sense of emotion, or at least at minimum, a thought of response whether inwardly or aloud.

This is the power of hip hop. This is the magnitude of a creative force that welcomes all and achieves the goal of becoming whatever is needed to be for that individual who purposefully sought out hip hop, fulfilling a necessity or maybe even a void – some space, spoken or unspoken. It is through this lens in which this paper is written. Reflections from one who has answered resoundingly in the affirmative that first, yes hip hop is loved and that it is worth studying, championing and often times brooding over, and; secondly, that hip hop is not enigmatic in its origins but is the reflection, the creative and stabilizing artistry of a people, all the while emitting and radiating provincial hope for a better world and tomorrow.

As complex as the sophistication of the countless human emotions, a few of them used to describe one’s feelings on hip hop – hip hop culture mirrors this diversity in its many facets of opinions, views, and states of being. Not only is this paper written as a fan and purveyor of historic contextual relevance, but also as one of the staunchest critics and dissenter of anything that does not reflect the best this culture has to offer. Some of the criticisms are mediated to various culprits and some rest squarely on the shoulders of the creative elements of the culture... WE! The criticism of that which one loves is the ultimate love and aspiration towards betterment, towards empowerment. And at its best, hip hop can become a catalyst for the betterment of all who encounter the positive affirming force of boundless creativity and audacity, resulting in an agency that will threaten to impact future generations in the positive.

It is coming to light as elements of hip hop’s ability to change perceptions and inevitably change
conditions are finding their way into the classroom and other youth-centered spaces with astounding results. Dyson (2007), one of the great minds of this generation, has this to say of hip hop and its robust potential for efficacious pedagogical change:

“Hip hop has long since proved that it is no cultural or intellectual fad. Its best artists and intellectuals are as capable of stepping back and critiquing its flows and flaws as the most astute observers and participants in any other genre of musical or critical endeavors. As the academic study of hip hop enters a new phase – as it matures and expands, as it deepens and opens up even broader avenues of investigation – its advocates must wrestle with the many-sided features of a dynamic culture that demands serious consideration. Hip hop scholarship must strive to reflect the form it interrogates, offering the same features as the best hip hop: seductive rhythms, throbbing beats, intelligent lyrics, soulful samples, and a sense of joy that is never exhausted in one sitting.” (p. 28)

This is a call to all who love hip hop to collectively make it something that we can make better than we found it and pass it on to subsequent generations as a testament to the power of utilizing hip hop to teach and create a better world.

It is almost impossible to advance critical hip hop pedagogy without fully understanding hip hop culture and its history, tracing the origins of hip hop to the culture of slavery, analyzing the relationship of hip hop to slave resistance and various resistance movements, and studying organizations like Hip Hop Congress who are dedicated in the preservation of hip hop culture. It is crucial to understand the unrelenting struggle of resistance set-fourth by blacks and other marginalized groups in America. People of African descent enslaved in America in particular, have utilized their artistic endowments not only to collectivize the masses of the oppressed, but also to forge new forms of expression resulting in mass movements of resistance and divergent artistry, and that artistry continues currently through the medium of hip hop. Aldridge and
Stewart (2005) suggest that “hip hop must be taken seriously as a cultural, political, economic, and intellectual phenomenon deserving of scholarly study, similar to previous African American artistic and cultural movements such as the Blues, Jazz, the New Negro Renaissance, and the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Arts Movements” (p. 190). Beyond just the study of hip hop, hip hop has evolved into a pedagogical tool in which students are empowered to learn and teachers are incentivized as educators by exploring beyond the traditional canon to progress the educational experience. Hip Hop Congress’ Urban Teachers Network, which is a collective support system for such an educator looking to enhance the classroom experience and form deeper bonds with their students, is formatively changing the way in which curricula is utilized in the K-16 pipeline, continuing the struggle for the marginalized and the oppressed.

B. The Popularity and Market of Hip Hop & Rap

It’s inescapable! The syncopations and the soundscapes are abounding. From commercials to car stereos, the pulsation and pound of a corpulent bass line can be heard undergirding the staccato of aggressively delivered rhymes in every inner city, rural town, borough, township and all points between. It’s an understatement to say that hip hop culture has captivated the imagination and passion of the young and young at heart throughout America and the world. The evidence is endless. From Jay-Z’s braggadocio verse that states “Hoppin up on Forbes List/Gorgeous/Hold UP” (Jay-Z, 2010), the evidence of the financial growth and popularity of the once considered terminally-ill culture reflex its opulence. In the 2007 issue of Forbes entitled “Richest Rappers”, Jay-Z, 50 Cent and P Diddy made a combined $94 million. What makes the amount significant is that the record industry has seen a significant decrease in revenue, over 21% since 2005, due in part to free music downloads and
other media outlets (Sanneh, 2007). The diversification of hip hop beyond record sales and the recording industry has driven the revenue streams of the aforementioned moguls, which illustrates the fact that hip hop is one of the most marketable and lucrative mediums currently.

Another captive audience garnered by hip hop music and culture is the social medium platform. According to Neilson Soundscan Weekly (2011), more sales are conducted online than at physical points of purchase, signifying the shift from traditional music media sales model (record store purchasing). According to the same source, hip hop has led the sales trending in this new arena of commerce and engagement. It is important to note that the iTunes Music Store (a software-based online digital media store operated by Apple), which opened on April 28, 2003 with over 200,000 items to purchase and now with over 16 billion download purchases, is now the number one music vendor in the United States (Taylor, 2003). Two albums which debuted three weeks after one another broke previous iTunes’ sales records, both hip hop albums combined selling over 600,000 albums the weeks of both releases (Aamoth, 2011). The duet album by arguably two of the best rappers alive Shawn “Jay-Z” Carter and Kanye West, Watch The Throne (2011), sold nearly 300,000 downloads, while subsequent release of hip hop artist Lil Wayne’s album Carter IV (2011) sold over 300,000 units, ushering in the advent of hip hop’s willing marriage to technology sourcing.

An addition to the media giant iTunes’ influence on hip hop, indicators of the popularity of hip hop through new and emerging platforms are the “YouTube sensations” that are now dictating the music industries record label rosters. YouTube, another media technology platform that displays a wide variety of user-generated video content including
movie clips, TV clips and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos, has changed the trajectory of hip hop and has garnered millions of new fans to the genre in the interim. One artist in particular who was propelled to stardom after he created a dance that became an overnight success, benefitted from the popularity of hip hop culture and the social media based YouTube. His rap name is De Andre Soulja Boy Tell em Way. In November 2005, Way posted his songs on the website SoundClick. Following positive reviews on the site, he then established his own web pages on YouTube and MySpace. In March 2007, he recorded "Crank That" and released his first independent album *Unsigned & Still Major: Da Album Before da Album*, followed by a low-budget video that demonstrated the "Crank That" dance. By May 2007, Way signed a major record deal and was on his way to a number one single (Grossman, 2012) There are many more stories to the affirmative that demonstrates the popular lure of the culture through the lens of technology, particularly the YouTube utility.

The popular cultural lens highlights the draw of hip hop music and culture, through billboard sales, fashion and other mediums. The attraction to hip hop by adolescents and others in essence interfaces with various stages of social identity for developing young adults. According to Dr. Fiona Mills, a professor who conducted a study on why white males love hip hop, for non-blacks and those who are not from urban environments, hip hop allows adolescents the ability to assume an alternate identity, which Mills calls *escapism*. This aspect of adolescence, which she also labels “Will to Pleasure,” is essential to development within moderation (Booker, 2011). Mills goes on to suggest that hip hop fashion is important to adolescent development because the fashion of hip hop is well-recognized, popular and allows all who partake in the clothing to easily affix an identity, one which is readily acceptable by
most. In addition to the developmental complement of hip hop culture with adolescence, it is reported that the natural sense of rebellion experienced as a stage of youth development is more narrowly defined through many of the messages posited by hip hop culture (Booker, 2011). The one caution that must be considered is that all aforementioned lures of hip hop must be tempered with a sense of discernment to understand that hip hop, particularly the negative aspects, are not principally analogous with black culture. This understanding is especially important for those who do not identify with black culture except through the images and messages in hip hop.

Thompson and Brown (2002) suggest that the messages in hip hop increase white awareness of black social issues. Furthermore, the scholars suggest that the popularity of hip hop culture, with designed initiatives, can be the catalyst in improving racial understanding in a multicultural context. The saliency of hip hop across demographics and other socio-cultural demarcations shows that the culture has a potential for making positive contributions to society. Education is another arena that when paired with the popularity and appeal of hip hop and the positive effects of the potential of hip hop culture, can create common ground for students, improving school climates and educational attainment (Beachum and McCray, 2011). The push and pull of hip hop culture and its interface with youth culture has given rise to the possibility of its implementation as a platform within formal education. In addition to the assessment of the connection between students’ experience with hip hop’s appeal, research on hip hop in the classroom must also focus on educational success as a metric of effectiveness.
C. Hip Hop’s Ideological Trends and Genre

A simple answer to a complex question, or in this case surmising the intricacies of the inception and birth of a movement, can be summed up in this manner: “The main hip hop entrepreneur was Herc. Then Bam gave an African flavor to it, and once he did that it was off the hook. Flash cut it up, and took it to a different level. Then Theodore scratched it. That started it – the evolution of hip-hop” (Ahearn & Fricke, 2002, p. 22). The insightful chronology given by DJ Disco Wiz is very precise in its account of key figures in the movement, but what is lacking is his attention to the masses who came together to forge forward with a new agenda. Turning away from the harmful practices of yesterday and trusting that through analysis of current patterns of behavior, they altered their conditions, summoning a more amicable way of coexisting in the face of marginalization and oppression. Ok, maybe most did not view their lives at the time in this manner, but one fact remains – that young adults from one of the poorest communities in post-industrial urban America, fettered by all of the sociological bi-products of systemic poverty, created a culture which empowered them to change, use their voice in an impactful way and in the wake of the cultural explosion affect the world. The founders, Kool Herc, Afrika Baambaataa, Grand Master Flash, Grand Wizard Theodore and others are credited with the innovations within the burgeoning process of the culture which moved the culture forward, but they would tell you that without mass movement through collective identity, they would not have been able to achieve what they are credited as achieving. This story is about the people – about the founders – about the conditions that gave way to progress that gave way to the elements.
I. Four Elements of Hip Hop

The origins of hip hop culture aesthetically coalesce from four distinct art forms. DJing, B-Boying, Graffiti Art and MCing (Rapping) all came together to form the backbone of the culture we've come to know as Hip Hop (Chang, 2005; Ahearn & Fricke, 2002; Rose, 1994). Each element grew from preexisting conditions which facilitated the development of the art form for the nurturing and nourishment of the culture. Two of the elements can be directly tied to the gang culture of the late 1960s in New York’s South Bronx community which preceded hip hop culture; those two elements are the antecedent of b-Boying and eventually b-Girling and graffiti art. Both of these elements have been reported to predate the inception of hip hop because they were integral parts of the ramped gang culture. There were those in gangs during the late 1960s that would dance and it was noted that these dances were a sort of war dance prior to violence with other gangs. Another former gang member recounted that the term B-Boy preceded hip hop. According to one former South Bronx gang member, they called guys who would go to parties and knock people out “b-boys” (Ahearn & Fricke, 2002 p. 12). It will not be until Afrika Bambaata brought the elements of breakdancing and graffiti together for peace measures that the culture of hip hop flourished as a departure from the systematic violence of the sixties.

KRS ONE (2003), the self-proclaimed embodiment of hip hop culture and founder of the Temple of Hip Hop, adds an additional element to the preexisting four elements (Graffiti, B-Boy/B-Girling, Djing and MCing) – that fifth element is Knowledge. He says without knowledge the other elements would not have come together nor would have existed independently in a hip hop aesthetic. KRS ONE, being one of the foremost authorities on the culture, has recently...
produced a song called “9 Elements,” which masterfully explains the necessity to include additional elements. In verse one, Blast Master KRS ONE (2003) raps:

One : Breaking or breakdancing
Rally b-boysing, freestyle or streetdancin'
Two : MC'ing or rap
Divine speech what I'm doing right now no act
Three: Graffiti art or burning bombin'
Taggin', writin', now you're learning! Uh!
Four : DJ'ing, we ain't playing!
{*scratch*} You know what I'm saying!
Five : Beatboxing
Give me a {*}beatboxin*} Yes and we rockin'!
Six : Street fashion, lookin' fly
Catchin' the eye while them cats walk on by
Seven: Street language, our verbal communication
Our codes throughout the nation
Eight: Street knowledge, common sense
The wisdom of the elders from way back whence
Nine : Street entrepreneur realism
No job, just get up call 'em and get 'em

Here's how I'm tellin' it, all 9 Elements
We stand in love, no we're never failing it
Intelligent? No doubt
Hip-Hop? We're not selling it out, we're just lettin' it out
If you're checkin' us out this hour, we teachin' hip-hop
Holy integrated people have it, I'm the present power!

His insightfulness pushes the boundaries of defining the culture. The first four or five elements, depending on who you ask, have encapsulated the culture in its infancy, but adding new elements speaks to the growth, development and international prominence and appeal of the culture currently. The nine elements now collectively accepted by hip hop culture are:

**MC**ing, **Graffiti**, **DJ**ing, **B-**boy/B-girling, **Beatboxing**, **Street Fashion**, **Street Language**, **Street Knowledge (Knowledge)** and **Street Entrepreneurialism**. This section will touch on the inception
of the original four elements and how they came together to form a culture, becoming the progenitor of the other newly acknowledged elements and how the element MCing, in pop culture has come to represent the culture of hip hop as a whole.

a. Graffiti

“Graffiti is an index of the intersection of public and private, a way of inscribing an architectural, monumental structure with the immediate concerns of an individual” (Christen, 2003, p. 54). Humans have used their surroundings since the beginning of recorded history to create and leave pieces of them on dwelling surfaces as a benchmark of humanity. Graffiti, from its earliest contriving, displays the same human desire to communicate, create and leave a measure of oneself long after leaving or even death. The word graffiti is a derivative of the romance linguistic Italian word Graffito, which means to scratch on a surface. When applying the term to ancient art, the word was used to describe elaborate murals painted by a sect of worshipers of the god Dionysus on the island of Pompeii circa 50 BC (Janson, 1991, p. 250). So to say that graffiti art is a new concept is a large understatement.

Brewer (1992) suggests that when analyzing the necessity to produce graffiti art, four fundamental explanations surface as to why the culture began, and continue to flourish in many hip hop environments across the world. He expounds on the four values that drive graffiti art, which is illegal in the majority of locales in which it is displayed as the compulsion for the artist to gain fame, artistic expression, power and rebellion. Brewer’s explanation shows the collective and intrinsic approach to the art form and how these values bring together like-minded individuals bound by these common bonds and the hope of accomplishing one or
more of the precepts of achievement. The premise of the art form as recounted by California artist Suvan Greer (1994), speaks to not only what an graffiti artist gets from doing graffiti, but possibly to why they might risk running into legal problems for the culture:

“Graffiti can be considered, in a social dialogue acted out in social space, as the activity of the disenfranchised youth of every country and socio-economic group. In the midst of cultural code alien to you, what to do but transgress the code? In the midst of a city of signs that exclude you, what to do but inscribe signs of your own?” (p. 2)

This potential insight into the collectiveness and actions of hip hop graffiti crews frames the purpose for the existence of graffiti art as part of the culture of hip hop. It is just as important to ascertain from the history how the culture has grown, evolved and has worked to advance hip hop culture as a whole.

In recent times, predating the known inception of hip hop culture, gangs in major urban cores across the east coast tagged for their gangs. According to germinal hip hop scholar, activist and former artist Davey D., graffiti in a hip hop aesthetic started outside the boroughs of New York; it actually started in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Davey D., 2004). One of the distinguishing marks that disentangle the origins of hip hop graffiti from gang tagging is the individuality of the markings. Gang-related imprinting, which is distinctive and mostly duplicated to brand the group, became individual names such as TAKI 183, JOE 136, YANK 135, etc. The more the names began to appear throughout subways and other inner city venues, the more elaborate and stylized the tags became (Chalfant, 1987). The two Philly taggers who first garnered public attention were graffiti artists Cornbread and Kool Earl in the late 1960s. Nearly simultaneously the hip hop graffiti scene began in New York. It is unclear if the art form
migrated from Philadelphia to New York, but what is clear is that once it became submerged in the party culture of the South Bronx in the early 70s, it developed and grew into a nationally and internationally appreciated art form.

The original graffiti artists most commonly used a marker to “tag” their name on nearly everything they came across with in hopes of being recognized for their recurring signature. One of the first graffiti artists who became famous for his work was a young artist named TAKI 185. TAKI 185 was a messenger who traveled throughout the city delivering packages. His tag was seen all over New York. It eventually caught the attention of a writer for Time magazine. In 1971 TAKI was interviewed and his interview sparked a frenzy of youth who wanted the notoriety of tagging. That one interview became the catalyst for the golden era of graffiti art (Brewer & Miller, 1990).

Graffiti artists in a quest to distinguish themselves from one another began to use different mediums to write their names. Most artists switched from markers to everything from paint to shoe polish to mixed pigments. The most commonly used product became the aerosol spray paint can. The spray paint allowed for larger tags in a short amount of time, which was better when considering the risk of being caught by the recently heightened security on the subway because of the advent of the graffiti culture. During this period another innovation in the aesthetic of tagging came with the spray paint can. Letters used to tag became thicker and eventually took on a script of their own. Many called this new thick blocked or bubbled writing *Wild Style*. By the mid-1970s, tagging once again evolved into its next phase known as the “Style War” era, which would be indicative of multilayered, elaborate
murals that retained an element of the evolving bubble and block script of the golden era (Chang, 2005). Blade and Pistol (2002), two of the pioneers of graffiti innovations, in the book “Yes, Yes, Y’all: Oral History of Hip Hop’s First Decade,” recount how they pushed the boundaries of design:

“By the end of ’72 to early ’73 you could actually see a development; the letters got bigger and people expanded. Bubble letters came along around ‘73, which was invented by Comet, Jester and Phase 2. You know, each one of them debate it, but that’s the first people you saw do that. And then by the end of ’74, you saw pieces with 3-Ds, with clowns, with designs, making characters... All the letters were flat and very one dimensional, so I came up with this thing called the 3-D. I don’t know – anyone could have done it, but I did it first, and I really worked it out. The piece I did was in 1973.” (p.16)

During this period the culture saw the emergence of the graffiti crews who came together to plan intricate mosaics of aerosol and watch out for the transit police and one another while undertaking these lengthy and timely feats of artist expression. Many argued that the graffiti was simply gang markings but proponents of graffiti culture would fire back in rebuttal, calling reference to the artistic merit of the “pieces.” The term “piece” came about during this era as an abbreviation for the term “masterpiece,” the complexity in which the murals were done was reminiscent of fine art. Fab 5 Freddy (Chang, 2005), an accomplished graffiti artist, wrote an article in the New York paper The Village Voice, championing the beauty and the transformative power of the graffiti art, sighting that the art had evolved from subway cars to beautifying dreary walls in decaying neighborhoods throughout the city. He wrote about Lee Quiones, a graffiti artist who painted several murals in Brooklyn in hopes of beautifying his community. In 1978, both Lee and Fab 5 Freddy became the first graffiti writers
to present their art in Europe (Chang, 2005). These efforts of beautification became the subject of a very nebulous theory created by a Harvard criminologist named Dr. James Wilson who posited the *Broken Window Theory*, which stated that if a community allows a window to go unrepaired, that in a short period of time that neighborhood will be driven into a state of chaos and criminality. His broken window was a metaphor for the perceived outgrowth of unregulated sanctions for graffiti writing (Chang, 2005).

During the 1980s, the graffiti culture proliferated throughout the country and the world, while locally in New York the subway graffiti was all but eradicated, leaving only memories of a time of daring and danger as would be taggers raced to be the first to “hit up” an area in the subway while constantly keeping a watchful eye for the transit police. The culture has transcended the narrow range of one subway stop to the next and took a quantum leap to the world art galleries, album covers and virtually became the visual representation of urban culture. But the architects of this culture phenomenon will be quick to tell you that they did not create and maintain this visual part of hip hop culture simply for global acceptance; they will tell you they did it and will continue to do it as an unapologetic expressive voice that speaks as loud as it wants and says what it wants when it wants. This concept is conveyed perfectly in an article written by Kevin Element (1996) which sums up the attitude and the purpose the art form continues:

“The Hip Hop Graffiti artist has an agenda, one which those in government would like to stamp out with a make believe “war on graffiti.” Hip Hop Graffiti artist ask for no money no permission and no respect from the greater art community. They have found a new voice, one which sings of freedom, rebellion and original thought. Should this be stopped? I think not. The graffiti artist is the last breed of artist, the one that has made the full cyclical return to what was the advent of visual
creation, the cave artists. As once stated by Xylene, “This is this the alpha and omega in chaotic theory... the graffiti artist are the urban shamans and the streets are our modern day caves.” (p.5)

b. B-Boying/B-Girling (Breakdancing)

“By the early to mid-1980’s, breaking would inspire black and Latino youth nationwide to become part of a street dance movement, their enthusiasm for this rhythmic dance revolution informed by the popping and locking they had seen on Soul Train” (Reeves, 2008, p. 6). The evolution of urban dance resulting in the art form breakdancing is shrouded in the ambiguity of claims lodged by many who rightfully feel a sense of ownership in the influencing of B-boying and eventually B-girling. Additionally within the pursuit of discovery to push the boundaries of knowledge around the one key moment when former gang and gang members made the transition from collective bodies of destruction and endangerment to bodies used to invent and edify, scholars have taken an ideological path to explain its origins. The fact remains that former gang members, mostly Black and Puerto Rican, changed the toxically violent culture of the late sixties to a culture centered on creativity, self-respect and awareness through the infectious art of head and backspins and poppin and lockin. This discussion is intended to piece together what is known of that evolutionary moment in hopes of adding or at least fortifying another branch of the tree of knowledge of b-Boying and b-Girling.

As a kid growing up in a fairly small semi-rural community in North Carolina in the mid 80’s, I can remember getting large, often times soiled cardboard boxes, most likely used to house refrigerators for travel, out of the dumpster with several of my childhood friends and taking turns practicing the technique of backspinning. It was unclear to me, being so far
removed from the bright lights and concrete of New York City and having never been there to this point in my extremely young life, how I first recognized the cultural aspect of what I was doing and how I developed favorable opinion of this dance phenomenon which I have witnessed enough times. To me, this example of the nebulous start of my interaction with break dancing, is how I view the recounting and communicating of the origins of hip hop’s dance element, B-boying and B-girling. In actuality, man has expressed himself rhythmically since the beginning of recorded history, so to actually pinpoint the definitive moment of hip hop dance’s inception on a continuum of evolving physical rhythmic expression is nearly impossible, but here is an attempt of contribution.

There are many such as Garrett-Martin (2002), who suggests that hip hop takes its roots from the repressed slave culture in the Americas. She argues that the enslaved African was intentionally stripped of the drum, which was the core element of rhythmic expression and punished for dancing, in fear of its power amongst the people, unless overseen by the master during his own amusement. It wasn’t until the free expression of African American church worship, coupled with the driving beat and foot stopping of the church music, that the free form of dance resurfaced in the slave community. It was and still believed that the invocation of God in one’s spirit is closely linked with the feverous undulations and inhibition of the body. These according to Garrett-Martin, reawaken the creative expanse and energy in the black body in America. The dilemma of conservative religious practice stifled the potential of physical expression relegating the use of one’s physical capacity to create the church experience. There will be duration of time before African Americans, unbridled by secular concepts of self-
expression, will once again use their bodies as an instrument to empower themselves and speak power to their existence. These are the antecedents of hip hop dance.

Another explanation for the origins of breakdancing is that it is a derivative of Brazilian Capoeira. Capoeira is an indigenous form of self-defense which was concealed in the form of a dance. The origins of rhythmic expression in both the United States of America and Brazil can only be explored through the lens of African slavery. One of the main differences in terms of the development of each is centered on the various forms of enslavement. For example, it was easier to maintain African cultural roots in Brazil, because there was not as much of a systemic effort to deculturalize the slave in Brazil as in the United States during slavery (Essien, 2008). So the development has to be examined through the context of divergent slave practices. Essien suggests that because of the unmistakable similarities between Capoeira and breakdancing’s floor routines which include the back spin and leg flairs, that there is a direct connection between the African cultural expression on two different continents.

The explanation which is closest in time and distance in relation to pinpointing the provenance of b-BOYing and b-GIRLING, is dated to the year 1969 when James Brown, the King of Soul, created a song and subsequently a dance craze from the song “Get on the Good Foot” (Chang, 2005). Michael Jackson, who was also influenced by the dancing and performance of James Brown, did the robot on Soul Train in 1974. The robot dance was created by Charles Washington also known as Charles Robot in the late 1960s. It wasn’t until it was seen on Soul Train that it became a part of popular culture and incorporated into competitive breakdancing practices in New York and simultaneously done on the West Coast, reportedly in Los Angeles.
In Los Angeles, the robotic moves were known as Poppin. Floor routines such as head spins, back spins and other acrobatics will come later as the dance form advanced all in the aesthetic of competition amongst dance crews in New York during the early 1970s.

Beyond all of the theories and logical connections to predecessors of Afrocentric artistic physical expression, those who founded the art of b-boying will tell you that their physical expression was purely a result of the social environment and climate and their reaction to it. Crazy Legs (Chang, 2005) of the legendary Rock Steady Crew comments:

“They didn’t know what the fuck a Capoeira was, man. We were in the ghetto! There were no dance schools, nothing. If there was a dance school it was tap and jazz and ballet. I only saw one dance school in my life in the ghetto during that time, and it was on Van Nest Avenue in the Bronx and it was a ballet school. Our immediate influence in b-boying was James Brown, point blank.” (p. 117)

This clearly shows that although indirectly, they acknowledge outside influences on the development of b-boying; the majority of b-boys and b-girls of the era leave the theories for others to imply. Most b-boys, being former gang members, can recall using elements of dance as a function of gang disputes. According to Luis Angel Matteo, the gangs would get together and the two war lords would get together and dance against one another and the winner would choose the sight of the gang fight. Often facilitated was the art of “Uprocking,” a war dance which was a ceremonial dance where both gangs would line up face to face and would execute choreographed dance and simulate punching and stabbing their foes across from them. Many times the uprock was impressive enough to settle the beef and other times it may deepen the conflict (Chang, 2005).
One of the earliest pioneers of hip hop as an art form was Kevin Donovan, who later on changed his name to Afrika Bambaataa. Bambaataa grew up in the Bronx, New York during the civil rights and post-civil rights eras. As a young man, he ran a street gang called the Black Spades amidst the urban backdrop of chard edifices left behind from civil unrest during previous years. Bambaataa commanded the respect of his peers with his wisdom and bravado. Eventually, Bambaataa had a desire to end the pandemic of violence affecting adolescents in the South Bronx at the time. His vision was to unify street combatants for a common cause, and create an outlet for non-violent conflict mediation and artistic expression. “The organization,” as it was called, united several previously warring housing projects together in hopes to stop the ever-present threat of drugs and violence. The organization was the predecessor of the world renowned Zulu Nation (Powell, 2002).

Afrika Bambaataa, a rap pioneer, seems to have lived in direct contradiction to today’s “evolved” rapper. The earliest emcees, following the tradition set by Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation, settled grievances in the realm in which most of the grievances originated, in a crowd, rhyme for rhyme or move for move. Inspired by the overwhelming positive influence of Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Kings dancers, many breakdance crews began to form and fill the void left by disbanded neighborhood gangs.

Some of the most well-known crews of the era were the New York City Breakers, the Seven Deadly Sins, Starchild La Rock, Sure Shot, and the Bronx Boys, along with countless other crews. Each neighborhood had local heroes that they revered like sports stars. Children would
watch them rehearse and copy their moves, in hopes of one day battling their way into the very crews that they spent so much time idolizing.

Each breaking crew had their stars that lead out in the battles, while invoking fear and admiration from opponents, virtually defying the laws of physics with breakdancing moves only the skilled could accomplish. Breakdancing masters, such as Beaver and Robbie-Rob of the Zulu Kings, Bos of Starchild La Rock, and Spy and Shorty of Crazy Commander’s, led their crews with passion and were instrumental in giving their crews stylized monikers that conveyed personas such as skill, strength, and intensity (Light, 1999).

It was through a strictly enforced dress code that each crew would create their own sense of presence. This style of dress and attitude toward the burgeoning culture became known as B-boying and B-girling. The Term B-Boy was made popular in the hip hop aesthetic when the DJ credited for the art of the cut n mix style of music manipulation, DJ Kool Herc, would yell “B-Boy go Down” as a cue to start break dancing. The cue was normally chanted over the James Brown record, “Get on the Good Foot” (Light, 1999).

Competition and the bi-products of that competition is the quintessence of hip hop culture. Many surmise that breakdancing is the most competitive aspect of hip hop, while other says it is MCing. Kid Freeze, the founder of the Floor Lords and member of both the United States Breakers and Crazy Breakers, says that “break dancing is where you see the real chemistry of hip hop” (p. 55). Reputations were won and lost, and valuable alliances were formed because of mutual admiration for opponents. As the art form grew from its humble yet importunate beginnings in the Bronx, eventually all five boroughs teamed with breaking crews
that gave youth a way to creatively work out differences and create a positive identity for themselves.

c. DJing (DJaying)

Recently a t-shirt began to be popularized in hip hop circles which emphatically proclaim, “DJ’s are the Backbone of the Culture.” The t-shirt is commonly worn by a group who in the eternal ebbs and flows of hip hop in the popular cultural lens, remain grounded in the traditional aspects of the culture. A person within this group will often be referred to as a “purist.” Even more specific than a “purist” who would don the t-shirt would be a DJ. Anyone who understands the evolution of the culture recognizes the contribution of the DJ to the inception, development and essentially the direction of hip hop culture. From the earliest recounting of hip hop history, the DJ was iconic. The DJ was the active ingredient needed to bring all of the elements together for the amalgamation of a cultural phenomenon that will transcend the very limits of even the founder’s imaginations. DJs such as Kool Herc, DJ Grand Master Flash, Afrika Bambaata and DJ Grand Wizard Theodore are credited with the fundamental innovations within the art of DJing. Without the competitive edge to always come up with the newest and “freshest” concepts to rock a party, the maturation of hip hop may have been more gradual or entirely different.

According to Nelson George, author of *Hip Hop America* (1998), there was a backlash to blacks in the disco scene. In an effort to capitalize on disco money, many black artists were pushed towards utilizing disco sounds in their music, turning many traditional R&B artists into crossover failures. All this horrible music inspired the phrase “Disco Sucks” and sadly, it was
often used in ignorant attacks against black artists in general. Despite optimistic talk outside the recording industry that disco would help black performers reach broader audiences and more lucrative careers, a glance at the charts from the period reveals just the opposite (George, 2008). In addition to the music industry, the club scene of the late sixties and early seventies became polarized as the have’s and the have not’s became apparent amongst the disco lights of clubs in the New York area, leading to the disenfranchisement and backlash against the poor youth of the Five boroughs.

It was in the late sixties when the popular cultural pendulum was swinging away from the iconic sounds of that decade and a club culture was beginning to simmer under the surface of a society sobering from the civil rights movement and the impending black power movement, when club culture came to be known as disco. In many urban cities across the country, the disco craze kicked open the doors of popular culture as bellbottoms, platform shoes, polyester leisure suits and afros came to represent the burgeoning new counter-culture. The club scene came to captivate the more affluent young adults of the early seventies as movies such as *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and others captured the imaginations of party goers who could afford to frequent New York clubs like Studio 54. George (1998) goes on to recount all of the most posh clubs in the New York clubs at the time that were closely tied to the growth of the disco music industry of the time:

“Calculated crossover, the obsession with disco, and the increasing corporate control of American music spoke to its insularity and narrow-mindedness. This corporate reality was mirrored by simple geography. In the mid-70s, most of the major labels were clustered together in Manhattan on Sixth Avenue or a block or two east or west. All were in walking distance from each other and from the decade’s posh discos – Regine’s, Zenon, and the immortal Studio 54. The city’s hippest black disco, Leviticus, was farther
down Sixth, just off Herald Square and two blocks from Madison Square Garden. It was a place where suits were required, cognac was the favored drink, and all the newly minted special market executives of corporate America did the hustle while trying not to sweat.” (p. 9)

Those who could not and did not fit into the fairly affluent disco culture were left out of the party. In a direct reaction to the exclusion of the early seventies club movement, poor blacks and Latinos created a party scene which will become the foundation of hip hop culture.

What must be noted is that Kool Herc, Grand Master Flash and Bambaataa are all of Jamaican decent and that the dancehall scene played a profound role in their desire to DJ and the techniques they used to create using record players, mixers and large high watt speakers. As a child, Clive Cambell grew up in Trenchtown, Kingston, Jamaica, the same community which gave the world Bob Marley and the Wailers. At a very young age, Cambell recalled being attracted to the base and synergy of Jamaican house parties. He was too young to attend, but would observe the fun and festivities from a distance. When he was very young, his mother left him and moved to America to provide more opportunities for the young Cambell and the rest of the family. Knowing his love of music she would send him James Brown and other popular African American music performers’ records back to the islands. In 1967, Cambell joined his mother in the West Bronx and brought with him a love of dancehall music and an ever-growing appreciation for diverse musical tastes (Nelson, 1999).

Growing up in the West Bronx, Cambell fit in very easily and displayed unmatched athletic prowess, which earned him the nick name “Hercules.” As he got older, his friends shortened the name and simply called him “Herc.” He would hone his skill as a DJ by practicing
mixing songs in his parents’ apartment at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue. Back before there were hip hop beats, in contrast to the current hip hop driven commercial craze, DJs such as Kool Herc perfected taking the break down in certain drum heavy songs. Songs such as “The Funky Drummer” and “Apache” created the sonic backdrop for b-boys anxiously awaiting their turn to hit the floor. During the jam made famous by DJ Kool Herc, he would yell on the mic “B-boys hit the floor.”

Herc threw his first party in 1973 at his family’s home; it was his sister’s birthday. After that party he DJ’d in the basement of his housing project building, after which his notoriety grew and he began throwing parties in high school gyms and other very large venues. Kool Herc had an uncanny ability to play old songs and mix them in such a way that created a unique musical experience. There were a lot of DJs in the Bronx at the time, but they all sounded similar because they just played the top hits (mostly disco) and did not have the blended and seamless continuation from song to song that the ingenuity of Kool Herc’s technique had. He became a local celebrity. He was so influential as a ghetto figure, so much that it was said if he gave someone a “shout out,” (recognizing an individual or groups in the party) that he would become an instant celebrity (Chang, 2005). While adored by partygoers, he was envied by fellow DJs, so much that every chance they would get rival DJs would try and emulate the records that were played during his sets in order to bridge the performance gap between themselves and DJ Herc. DJ Herc would implore an old dance hall technique used by Jamaican DJs to conceal the identity of the records played by soaking the labels off of the records so that only he knew what he was playing. This diversionary tactic which took a great deal of memory
to remember the label-less records by the break beats was an exceptional task. DJ Kool Herc stood shoulders above other DJs for this reason and his ability to mix.

He also had a talent of spotting other talented DJs and hype men. He enlisted the help of hip hop legends such as DJ Coke La Rock, Love Bug Starski and Busy Bee. These men, along with DJ Kool Herc, became known throughout the projects as Kool Herc and the Herculoids. They also became the first hip hop act in hip hop history. Many hip hop purist credit Coke La Rock with being the first rapper, but there are many who disagree with this assertion. Coke La Rock, also of Caribbean decent, would introduce the records in a dancehall fashion and would also hype up the record like a radio DJ. Although he did not rhyme like we are traditionally accustomed to rappers rapping today, many of his signature phrases became part of traditional hip hop verbiage (“ya rock and ya don’t stop” and “to the beat y’all”).

Around the same time, another legendary DJ became known for his innovative technique of sustaining break beats by using the method of two turntables; his name is Grand Master Flash (George, 1998). Grand Master Flash, whose real name is Joseph Saddler, migrated with his family from Barbados to the Bronx as a child. As a high school student, he learned how to repair electronic equipment in several vocational classes; this knowledge of electronics laid the foundation for his DJ innovations. He had a love of music fostered by his parents’ extensive record collection. Flash often joked that his father told him that he still had a more extensive collection than the internationally renowned DJ. He was often chastised for going through his father’s record collection, but would return it shortly after punishment. Flash was younger
than DJ Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaata, but admired them and studied their styles while honing his craft as a DJ at home.

In the bedroom of his parents’ apartment, Flash worked on perfecting the seamless transition from song to song, the backwards spin and scratching. Scratching is credited to another fellow DJ Grand Wizard Theodore, who is also credited with the technique of needle dropping (the art of putting the record needle precisely on the right spot during a mix), but was perfected by Grand Master Flash as a means of bridging two songs. Grand Master Flash is attributed with three DJ technique expansions: The Backspin Technique, Punch Phrasing and the aforementioned Scratching Technique. Flash understood that by using two of the same records (one playing through the speaker and the other one cued up in his headphones) he could extend a beat indefinitely by switching back and forth with a mixer. This technique is what is known today as the Quick Mix Theory. This mixing style is the foundation of hip hop mixes and allows for short break beats to play while blending in other songs continuously while an underlayment beat plays continuously.

Another technique developed by Grand Master Flash is the Punch Phrasing Technique also known today as the “Clock Theory.” Flash decided that extending beats and bringing in other songs was not enough; hence, he created a technique in which he would isolate a phrase on one record and play it while repeating it on the other. The backspin would allow him to go from record to record repeating the phrase on both turntables rhythmically, creating a new beat. Flash, being a showman, would stop the beat and isolate the phrase, and would keep both records spinning backwards by moving side to side while the phrase played often times
Grand Master Flash, like Kool Herc, also created a hip hop group. As a matter of fact, he would occasionally work with Herc’s protégé, Love Bug Starski and legendary rapper Kurtis Blow. Flash’s group was known as Grand Master Flash and the 3 MCs. One of the members, Melle Mel, is given credit for creating the moniker “MC” which means, Master of Ceremony and will later be synonymous with the phrase “Microphone Controller.” Later, the group added two more members and became known as Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five (Cowboy (Keith Wiggins), Melle Mel (Melvin Glover), Kidd Creole (Nathaniel Glover), Rahiem (Guy Williams), and Mr. Ness aka Scorpio (Ed Morris)). During this period of time, the DJ was still the most important part of a hip hop group and the show, but it will not be long before the MC will take center stage and be the driving element of hip hop culture. The very presence of the Furious Five on the ever-evolving hip hop scene changed the pecking order in hip hop. From 1976 until they began recording in 1980, the Furious Five with Grand Master Flash became the first hip hop group with a regular paid gig at one of the local Bronx clubs. This marked the first time a hip hop group made a living doing more than making money for parties thrown.

The group is credited with advancing rap lyrical content from simple non-rhyming radio voiced “hype the DJ” tactics to an edgy “move the crowd” ethos that made young, inspiring ghetto kids aspire to rhyme, DJ, breakdance or do graffiti. The Furious Five are attributed with creating the hip hop rap battle, free styling (extemporaneous and unrehearsed rapping to a beat) and MC phrases that endure to this very day (“throw your hands in the air and wave em...”)
like you just don’t care,” “clap your hands to the beat” and “somebody scream”). They also engineered the technique of tossing rhymes back and forth between one another. For example Melle Mel would say a phrase and Kidd Creole would say another phrase rhyming in syncopation. This group took rhyming to another level and became the prototype of those who wanted to rhyme as an MC. In 1982, they went on to produce the first socially conscious rap song in hip hop history that was appropriately entitled “The Message.” The proliferation of rappers and the style in which they rap owe a large debt of gratitude to the five MCs from the Bronx. They will in recent years be given a hip hop Vanguard award from VH1 and continue to perform to this very day. Rap music as part of hip hop culture will capture the hearts and minds of adolescent popular culture in a way that will resonate in American culture, grafting itself into the party scenes and adolescent anti-establishment movements on a global scale.

d. MCing (Emceeing)

It must be noted that the art of verbally chanting in a syncopated or rhythmic cadence is nothing new. Many proponents of rap music suggest that it is the technological advancements of the modern drum track which separates the art of modern MCing or rapping from its progenitors (Light, 1998). Some will argue that rap music takes its cue from the traditional call and response and oratory tradition found embedded in the ministerial singing cadence of the stylist sermonic performance in the African American church. One of the greatest examples of this tradition can be found in the stylized preaching of one of the greatest orators in modern time, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His ability to put together his speeches in a manner very closely resembling singing, often using rhyming words and cleaver phraseology, evoked unbridled
emotion from all who listened intently to every word spoken. This tradition can be seen in the lyrical word play of modern rap orators who indirectly channel the emotion-inducing aesthetic inherent in the ministerial sermon.

Another African American tradition that the art of rapping draws comparison from is the long-standing rhyming cadences of adolescent chants created on the urban playgrounds by children as a means of enjoyment, competition and style. These performances often closely resemble the energetic extolling of a cheerleading squad, but often not as rhythmic, as foot stomps, claps and finger snaps are intricately used resembling antiquated drum tracks synchronized to rhythmic intonations. This predecessor to the aesthetic of rap finds itself as the subject of two particular songs that utilize adolescent chants as the focus of pop cultural songs, according to Light (1998). “The Name Game,” a song performed by Shirley Ellis in 1964 which channeled the African American children’s rhyme, became an instant success on the billboard charts that year. The song rhymed multiple names with the word “banana.” These rhymes held a long-standing tradition as a ritual of African American child’s play and became a radio hit, bridging the gap between youthful incantations and the onset of hip hop culture.

Another cadence counting song from childhood rhymes is revamped from the very popular little Sally Walker chant of the early part of the twentieth century (Light, 1999). The rendition was sung by Syl Johnson in 1968. The song, very similar to The Name Game, was a crossover success and pushed the context of rhyming over music closer to the forefront of the popular cultural paradigm. The words and meter cannot be mistaken for anything other than an early rap:
“Little Sally Walker
Sitting in a saucer
Rise, Sally, rise
Wipe your dirty eyes
Put your hand on your hip
Don’t let your backbone slip”
(p. 4)

Recently, the song has resurfaced as a new dance craze, continuing the penchant of infusing nursery rhymes into hip hop songs. It was not long after the first rap song hit the airwaves in September of 1979, that another song hit the radio with a splash; the song was “Double Dutch Bus.” Frankie Smith recorded and released the song “Double Dutch Bus” in 1981 as a funk song, but it became included in hip hop history. The lyrics to the song are sang, but because of its staccato nature, derived from a chant used while children twirl two jump ropes, the song has been relabeled as one of the first hip hop songs. In recent years, many components of the Double Dutch Bus song have been used in several songs intended to invoke the aesthetic of rap music from the early days of the genre (Light, 1999).

Another such theory on the catalyst of rapping, and possibly the most plausible one, is the aesthetic of rapping directly augmented from the spoken word tradition made famous as an artistic outgrowth of the black power movement. Griots such as the Watts Prophets, Gil Scott Heron and The Last Poets artistically spoke the words and messages of Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Frantz Fannon and others. These poems took root and found resonance in the urban core of New York and profoundly affected the self-efficacy of the early hip hop pioneers, charging them to create and not destroy. If the culturally invigorating poems of the Black Arts Movement stirred their souls and developed a sense of communal compulsion, then the toast,
the ghetto sonnets of “Bad Man” through “the Signifying Monkey” and other poems, fostered a sense of verb ado as a utility for the raw energy rap music is known for. “The Signifying Monkey” and other poems commonly heard in the ghetto told of a trickster figure, commonly recurring in black folklore since slavery, tells of a black man too clever to be downtrodden by the guiles of racism and oppression, but cool enough to accomplish anything he decided to do despite the obstacles. This mythical figure will be the basis for most of the Blaxploitation characters that occurred simultaneously with the inception of hip hop culture (Reeves, 2008).

Rap music will become synonymous with the culture of hip hop and will be seen as the totality of the four elements in popular culture. When rap music hit the airwaves in September of 1979, the nation was eager to acculturate the urban sound while emulating the dress, language and attitude of the inner city-inspired movement. Less than a decade later, with the advent of the first hip hop music video show *Yo MTV Raps* hosted by Graffiti legend Fab Five Freddie, the nation and eventually the world, utilized hip hop as a conduit of the black experience, and rap music as the quintessence of the hip hop experience. Rap music will speak for generations of youth.

II. Hip Hop vs. Rap Music

Rap music has come to represent the culture of hip hop in popular culture. With the over-saturation of breakdancing in the mid-eighties and the systematic censorship of graffiti art, the proliferation of rap crews, the commodification of rap and the hip hop video have lead to the element of emceeing or rapping moved to the forefront of the culture (Chang, 2005; Neale, 1999). In response to this misguided concept, KRS ONE, the self-proclaimed teacher
retorts in his song *Hip Hop Knowledge* that “Rap is what we do... Hip hop is what we live.” Pate (2010) expounds on this concept in his book, *The Heart of the Beat*, by distinguishing between the political, socio-cultural collective consciousness of the people and the artistic output produced as a bi-product of the former:

“Hip Hop is the world, the culture that envelopes rap (including rap/poetry and the music). Although there are strongly native impulses circulating within this cultural reality, I understand hip hop culture as one that is politically oppositional to an imagined dominant majority (read white), overtly racialized (read African American), heteronormative, youth centered, competitive, egalitarian, and global.” (p.2)

This definition posits rap music as squarely aligned and equal with the other elements developed as a new evolution of the black political and artistic aesthetic conceived through and as a response to systemic long-standing disenfranchisement.

Situating rap music as the voice of a politically charged movement of defiance, many within the culture feel that it is imperative to guard and protect the content and context in which the voice speaks. This paradigm induces the conversation around the message and intimation that is disseminated from throughout the ranks of hip hop. Oftentimes the issue of authenticity surfaces in the midst of commercial hip hop, global expansion and the disingenuous reproduction and emulation of the culture through the music. Phrases such as “Keep it Real” and “Real Talk” frame the cynicism fostered as an originating East Coast hip hop culture that watches its expansion outside the region and eventually goes global. Perry (2004) suggests this notion has a two pronged connotation: a) it signifies an authentic urban sensibility and a celebration of the struggles associated with the aesthetic of impoverished living and b) it
serves as an identifying device of authenticity associated with the preservation of fundamental aspects of, in this case the culture of hip hop. Often those within the culture of hip hop who are entrusted either by others or self-appointed to stand vigilant against outsiders are referred to as “Hip Hop Purists” or “Hip Hop Heads.” Neate (2003) expounds on the role of these “Heads” in parsing out fundamental values within the culture from external forces who oftentimes do not share the same values:

“When heads refer reverentially to “hip-hop culture,” they are often doing two things: positively affirming what it is but also defining what it is not. Generally it is regarded as the four core skills of the B-boy: as emcee, DJ, graffiti artist and breakdancer (and sometimes a fifth element, the nebulous “consciousness” is thrown into the mix for good measure). What hip hop is not is just “rap music.” The line between the two is frequently fine and often disputed but it’s important nonetheless. Perhaps the simplest way of understanding it is as a Venn diagram: while all hip hop is specific and meaningful, rap covers a multitude of sins. Similarly, while all emcees are rappers, not all rappers are emcees. An emcee represents the culture, whereas rappers just rap.” (p. 5)

Some may inquire, what is it that they are protecting the culture from and why is it important to try (futilely) to preserve a foregone concept of a culture that has long since been commercialized and commodified, acting as a fervent utility of nihilism, misogyny, violence and utter depravity? The answer lies within the very purpose for the inception of the culture. The culture exists as an answer to and a resistance from theoretically the same corruptible forces that control the dissemination and propagation of stereotypes of marginalized groups. These stereotypes through the generations have been utilized as a source of entertainment, a reinforcement of white supremacy and have served as a major source of capital for those that have chosen to exploit the exaggerated African American image (Ogbar, 2007).
In the case of hip hop, the image that is pushed through commercial means comes in the form of a rap lyric, a catchy hook and oftentimes a ghetto writhe tail of criminality and destruction. Hip hop purists take great exception to the exploitation and bastardization of that which they hold dear and go to great means to stem the tide of the culture gone awry amidst a global feeding frenzy of all things appearing to be hip hop. Understanding that rap music dominates the multifaceted cultural expression of hip hop, purist remain vigilant in using their voice to say to the masses of young consumers that there is more to hip hop than the lack of sustenance heard from the every hour on the hour narrowly conscripted songs that are on the radio. Most who view hip hop and rap in much broader terms than those who only view rap in a commercial format will not deny the valued existence of other forms of hip hop. Other forms such as gangsta rap (which often times is imbued with elements of violence, misogyny, nihilism and other negative reinforcing stereotypes within its content) has a place on a continuum of rap genres, but most hip hop heads will be quick to say that “conscious rap,” the voice and message that represent the antithesis of gangsta rap and other forms of rap that are limited in content, is marginalized and silenced in popular culture. These “conscious messages” are ignored and demonized for their lack of commercial appeal, while the only messages pushed and promoted on the radio are oftentimes negative and nihilistic while exalted as the totality of hip hop culture.

III. Gangsta Rap vs. Conscious Rap

When engaging in the topic of the relevance of messages disseminated through rap content and lyrics, a dialectical paradigm emerges with rapidity. The issue of “good music”
versus “bad music” or “conscious rap” versus “gangsta rap” inundates the dialogue. One might argue that in order to define oneself, it is equally important within the process of doing so to convey how one differs in definition to others or draw contrast in terms of position. Most will fall on one side or the other in the struggle for the control of the contextual and aesthetic nature of rap music – essentially the soul of the culture. However, Dyson (2007) posits that when analyzing hip hop culture and its music, that one must be cautious not to deal in the binary of good and bad. This dialectic approach, according to Dyson, omits the intricacies of form and content associated with the multivariate messages within hip hop.

Dr. Cornel West, a self-identified aficionado of conscious hip hop music, weighs in on the philosophical dichotomy which exists in rap music. In the book *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (2004), West posits that the media and capitalism have frustrated the democratic process for young people in America, and that they use the youth culture of protest to speak out against injustice. He goes on to suggest that the youth culture of protest is very much alive through hip hop music and that it acts as the main thrust against free market fundamentalism and inequality. He acknowledges the reality of the current state of hip hop, but argues that true hip hop is disgusted with nihilism and the hypocrisy of America’s social structure at its core. West accounts for the apparent contradiction between hip hop’s reality and his definition of the culture by explaining that there are two phases of hip hop culture: 1) Prophetic hip hop, which is the conscious form of rap music which deals with topics associated with social injustice and collective empowerment and protest and 2) Constantinian hip hop, which is a rap form that deals with negative content and the reinforcement of stereotypes associated with violence, misogyny, nihilism and other negativity and is very
individualistic in nature. He derives these phases from historical Christian views of society, prophetic Christians being those who spoke out about injustice and utilized their beliefs for the betterment of the community. In contrast, Constantinian Christians led by Constantine co-opted Christianity for political and economic gain. He likens the philosophy of Constantine to the large conglomerates that control the imagery and direction of commercial rap music. West concludes by espousing the hope in hip hop in suggesting that the current state of hip hop is tenuous and can be changed by supporting and championing the cause of the prophetic in hip hop culture.

Ogbar (2007), another intellectual, illustrates the antagonistic history of conscious hip hop and gangsta rap by suggesting that 1988 was the year in which prototypical albums of both genres were released. The album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* was released by Public Enemy to rave reviews and considered one of the greatest hip hop albums ever created. Ogbar considers this album the quintessence of politically conscious hip hop music. The album, unapologetic in its militancy, tackled major issues such as drug abuse in the black community, political and economic disenfranchisement and even the prison industrial complex. Despite its unflinching stance on racism and classism in America, the album was a commercial success by with young adolescent consumers. The album is frequently mentioned by countless contemporary conscious hip hop artists as the progenitor of their work.

The same year, NWA, acronym for *Niggas with Attitudes*, released the album *Straight out of Compton*, which spawned the gangster-infused rap music of the West Coast and the organized crime aesthetic of East Coast rap, subsequently. The album was filled with tracks
about drug dealing, the labeling of women as sexual objects and gratuitous violence of
magnanimous proportion rarely heard to this point in hip hop history. This album was critically
acclaimed as well and ushered in the pivotal change in the style of hip hop from conscious and
often festive to a more dark, sinister and menacing thematic portrayal of criminality in ghetto
life (Ogbar, 2007).

Gangster rap has its roots in the ramped gang culture of Los Angeles’ black and Hispanic
neighborhoods such as Watts, South Central and Compton – places that have been ravaged by
deindustrialization, post-race riots which economically destroyed the community, and racially-
divided communities, similar to the South Bronx. There was a thriving hip hop community in
L.A. which consisted of B-boys and B-girls, but they were short-lived because the few clubs
which were hip hop oriented such as the club Radio, according to Chang (2005), became
occupied by gangs who did not want to listen to east coast inspired hip hop. Instead they
preferred funk such as George Clinton and the Parliament Funk-a-delics and Roger and Zapp to
early hip hop artists from New York. Gangsters drove out the B-boys breakdancing and pop and
locking turned to Crip Walking (The gang Crips were a post black power mutation of the Black
Panthers).

Growing up in the hyper gang culture in Compton and South Central, none of the
members of NWA were gang members. O’Shea “Ice Cube” Jackson was a gifted athlete that
was bussed out to the San Fernando Valley suburbs for school. He formed a group with several
high school friends called C.I.A. (Criminal in Action) and performed at local clubs on the
weekend. Andre “Dr. Dre” Young and Antoine “DJ Yella” Carraby were local DJs who
deliberately avoided the neighborhood gangs; both felt that gangs didn’t pay. Both men were signed to a contract with Alonzo Williams and joined a group called World Class Wreckin Cru. The crew was very androgynous resembling the Artist Prince in appearance, wearing make-up and costumes when performing. The image was soft for the Compton and South Central environment. Eventually both men left the group and hooked up with Eric “Easy E.” Wright, a middleclass-bred young man who dropped out of high school, became a well to do drug dealer turned entertainment manager. Eric Wright, after bailing Young out jail, bribed Young to sign with him to a management deal, making beats for an east coast group signed to him called HBO (Wright felt that their slow east coast rap style would go over well as a juxtaposition to the fast techno style rap done on the west coast). O’Shea Jackson, a great lyricist who penned many songs about sexual exploits and violence, wrote a song for the group. The East Coast group angrily rejected the song saying that it was that “West Coast Shit,” that song was The Boyz in the Hood (now considered the gangster rap anthem). There was no one to do the song, so Wright, after much coaxing, rapped Jackson’s lyrics and they put the song out and sold the songs out of their trunks and at the Swap Meet, the local flee market where most went to purchase inexpensive goods. Reeves (2008) suggest that it is Wright’s voice that makes the song a success as one of the first cross over hardcore West Coast gangster rap songs:

"Boyz’ was as raw and authentically street sounding as its predecessors, but what set it apart was Eazy’s delivery: the evil, almost Munchkin-like sound of his voice-spewing the rhymes as if they were threats issued by a bloodthirsty, hypersexed kid-gave ‘Boyz’ a humorously dark quality.” (p.99)
Their brash in your face attitude was a direct contradiction and confrontation to and with the politically-charged hip hop of their socially-conscious predecessors. In an interview with talk show host Arsenio Hall in 1990, the group openly criticized conscious hip hop artists who supported the anti-apartheid movement by saying “we don’t care about them because they don’t care about us.” They went on to call anyone who supported Black Nationalism “fake medallion wearers” and proceeded to call them “overnight black men” (Hall, 1990). These comments were a direct challenge to the waning climate of politically-charged hip hop entering the 1990s.

NWA went on to perform one of the most controversial songs in rap music history called *Fuck the Police*. This song delivered two distinct messages: 1) it served notice to the injustice suffered by blacks and browns in the urban core of Los Angeles at the hands of the police, which was prophetic acting as a harbinger of what was to come with the Rodney King beatings and subsequent riots; 2) it made NWA a radical commodity at which they capitalized with record sales topping the 300,000 mark without any promotion (Reeves, 2008). This number of records was nearly unheard of in that day in particular with no radio airplay and no marketing dollars. This was a clear indicator to the record industry that gangster rap was a lucrative commodity and that stories of inner city crime and instability would sell. NWA opened the floodgates of aspiring artists ready to cash in on nihilism whether fact or fictional. This trend of gratuitous violence, overt misogyny, crime and immorality, “studio gangsters, hoes with attitudes and gangster bitches” proliferated and alarmed many, intentionally causing a ground swell of opposition and criticism, which only fueled the market even further – gangster rap kicked in the industry doors.
Critics such as Congresswoman Deloris Tucker and others denounced the music with public CD demolitions and government legislation on obscenity in rap music. The crusade against gangster rap gained momentum, when in 1992, West Coast rapper Ice T. put out the song *Cop Killer* on his album *Body Count*. The irony of the rapper Ice T. and the song is that after his rap career began to falter he has since made a living as a police officer in film and sitcom. This song evoked the backlash of conservatives, government officials and police alike. The song along with Tupac’s *A Souljah Story* was blamed in the court of public opinion as the reason for the slaying of state trooper at the hands of Ronald Ray Howard (Ogbar, 2007). With all of the public backlash and outcry about gangster rap’s lyrical content, no one bothered to analyze the multifaceted culture and realize that there were those within the culture that objected staunchly to the messages conveyed in the name and form of hip hop culture. Had they bothered to look beyond their own sentiment of revulsion, they would have seen that hip hop was and still is divided along lines based upon message and content.

The “conscious” or progressive part of the hip hop community shot back at the superfluous nature of gangster rap and stood in amazement at the myopic consumption of a disingenuous art form. Many artists such as Jeru the Damaja (1994), a popular conscious emcee, fed up with the current trends in rap music, wrote a song called *Come Clean*, in which he verbally attacked the gangster rap ethos by exposing gangster rappers as frauds. Common (1994), considered the quintessential conscious hip hop artist, indirectly took a shot at gangster rap on his classic ode to hip hop culture called *I Used to Love Her*. In the song he metaphorically chronicled his relationship with a woman, but in actuality is rapping about the changes hip hop has undergone. Like hip hop purists before him, Common exhibits his
endearing commitment to the culture through his elaboration of a fictional relationship which he admits is faltering. The title *I Used to Love Her* is indicative of his discontentment with the state of hip hop. In the song he raps about meeting her/hip hop when he was very young and falling in love. Common goes on to say that he respected her, calling her a “pure untampered and a down sista” and that he misses her, clearly an admission of disdain for hip hop’s direction. Further in the song he raps about hip hop’s consciousness:

Out goes the weave (fake hair typically associated with euro-centric aesthetic beauty) in goes the braids beads medallions.

She was on that tip about stopping the violence (referring to the stop the violence movement)

About my people she was teacher, but not preachin’ to me but speakin’ to me in a method that was leisurely.

Admittedly, Common situates his consciousness within the predecessors of nationalist hip hop which undoubtedly influenced his choice of subject matter as an artist. Declaring his allegiance to traditional conscious hip hop, Common goes on to discursively dig at the growing popularity of gangster rap by expressing that he separated from her/hip hop and at which time she moved to the West Coast. This declaration cannot only be interpreted as expressing a shift in popular culture’s interest in conscious East Coast music, but potentially an admission of a divorce from Common’s popular music base and relegation as an “underground artist” in the wake of the shift to West Coast gangster rap.
Common adds that when she went to the West Coast that he wasn’t upset, but she then disavowed all that he loved about her. He infers that she lost her sense of self when she begins making money:

I’m a man of expanding so why should I stand in her way
She’d probably get her money in LA
And she did stud, she got big pub but what was foul
She said the pro-black was going out of style
She said Afro Centricity is of the past
She got into R&B Hip House Base and Jazz

The hip hop purist in Common is in conflict with the commercial turn that hip hop had taken in the early to mid-nineties. He not only indicted gangster rap for what he called “taking hip hop to the sewer,” he also blamed the industry which he called “the man” for the same atrocity:

I failed to mention that the chick was creative
But when the man got to her he altered her native
Told her if she got an image and gimmick that she would make money
And she did it like a dumby
Now I see her in commercials, she’s universal
She used to only swing it with the inner city circle
Now she be in the ‘burbs’ lickin rock and dressin hippy
And be on some dumb shit when she comes to the city
Talkin bout popping locks selling rocks and hitting switches
(referring to west coast low riding (a definite diss to the west coast))
Now she’s a gangster rollin with gangster bitches
Always smoking blunts and getting drunk
Telling me sad stories now she only fucks with the funk
Stressin how hardcore and real she is
But she was the realist before she ever got into showbiz

Common describes a woman with a serious identity crisis and a penchant for fame and recognition, which he undoubtedly associates with her lack of clear direction and purpose. The
dichotomy in image described through the masterful story telling of Common definitively illustrates his clear fidelity to the ideas espoused by the forefathers of hip hop and their progressive progeny. Separating himself from the depravity of industry, yet still longing for that which he had lost to her loss sense of direction, he ends the song by jealously reclaiming his love:

I see niggas slamming her taking her to the sewer
But Imma take her back hoping that the shit stops
Cause who I’m talking bout ya’ll is hip hop.

This song is one of many songs penned and performed through the years decrying the loss of intent and purpose of portions of hip hop culture so taken by the trappings of industry that it has seemingly sold its soul to for a promise of personal wealth and fame, omitting its obligation as a voice of the people.

Artists like Mos Def, another emcee upholding the collective values of his predecessors, lashed out at the music industry as a causational force of individual artist often times conforming to industry pressure to portray an image and create music that is unrealistic and defamatory in nature. In the song The Rape Over, Mos Def lambastes the industry for its preferential rewarding of artists that perpetuate violence and hyper materialism for the sake of controversial exposure. Mos Def (2004) perniciously raps about the music industry:

All White men is running this rap shit
Corporate forces is running this rap shit
We poke out our asses for a chance to cash in
Mos Def cynically and directly points the finger at the corporate executives who own the major record labels as the bearer of responsibility for the negative conditions that persist in the industry, which he expounds upon further in the song. His inculpation is aimed squarely at the controllers of the major labels who own the majority of independent labels, distribution outlets and media outlets. He then speaks in first person narrative as if he were one of the record executives who he unequivocally blames as the author of the negative trends in rap music. This record executive is candidly speaking to his artist and conveying his ideas on the direction and future of the artist’s potentially short-lived career:

Hey lil souljah you’re not ready for war
But don’t ask what you’re fighting for
They thought that you survived the gunfight, the drama, the stress
You get in the line of fire we get the big ass checks
You gettin your choice to pimp
Make your choice and fall in
I let you sip, cups of army (a drink that is popular amongst rap artists),
get a Mercedes
And kick back and let you pay me, my Mack is crazy
I leave the knife and fist fight filled with glamour
Yeah, take a picture with this platinum-plated sledgehammer
We over-do it add the fire and explosion to it
We sell confusion we run rap music

This verse illustrates the music’s commodification and glorification of intra-artist violence which resulted in the high profile deaths of several famous rappers who were directly or indirectly killed after media touted beefs played out on TV, videos and magazines. This trend of verbal and often physical altercations seemed to take on a life of its own while simultaneously jumpstarting and sustaining careers. The end result is that record labels
capitalized on the embroilments, seemingly not willing to intervene as a mediatory force of
civility, but would release posthumous albums after a senseless death of an artist.

Lastly, Mos Def ends the song in the same fashion in which he began, by renaming the
forces responsible for rap music’s current debauchery:

MTV is running this rap shit
Viacom is running this rap shit
AOL and Time Warner running this rap shit
We poke out our asses for a chance to cash in

Mos Def specifically mentions the major conglomerates that own most of the labels and
direct the market, developing the sound and influencing the images channeled through media
outlets governed by those same conglomerates. If his theory about the magnitude and power
of the music industry is correct, then Mos Def’s cynicism about the capacity of the industry
stands to reason. Garofalo (1987) suggests that in the 1970s and 1980s record companies
gained primary control of manufacturing, distribution and access to other media outlets such as
radio and television. In addition to this fact, the music industry also comprises a large share of
the profit made in all media in America. A major reason for the seemingly unbridled capability
of the record industry to control media auxiliaries is its unchallenged distribution to radio and
television (Albarran, 1996).

Mos Def named three of the five major companies that comprise the largest stake
holding in the record industry. In a PBS special entitled The Merchants of Cool (2001), the
program went into great detail in naming and encapsulating the amassed wealth of each
company. The documentary also ranked the companies and discovered that it was the actual
mergers of these companies that gave them their leviathan statures in the record business: AOL/Time Warner merged in 2001 for $165 billion dollars, becoming the largest conglomerate in history; Viacom/CBS merged in 1999 and generated $12 billion dollars; the Australian based News Company is worth $14 billion in 2000; the German media conglomerate Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG) is worth an estimated $13 billion; Vivendi/Universal merged with The Seagram Company Ltd. and both Japanese Sony and Walt Disney are tied with a net worth of $25 billion.

Vivian (1995) calls the major five record labels that account for 94% of the music industry revenue “The Big Five.” In addition to the companies, AOL/Time Warner, Viacom, BMG, Vivendi and Walt Disney, these “oligopolistic conglomerates” also make $7 out of every $8 earned on a CD (Compaine & Gomery, 2000). Artists are forced to sign with one of the aforementioned labels if they want an opportunity to reach the largest consumer market through exposure on the radio and television as well as major national and international album promotions. This reality puts these major labels solely in control of the direction, content and marketing of its artist and any who aspire to achieve success in the music industry. The corporately colluded and controlled triangulation between the record industry, the radio and television media create a market structure that feeds on the crafted image of the artist and leave minute opportunities for individualized imaging or self-expression.

The music industry’s direct influence over the radio industry is very concentrated and refined similar to the concentrated power of the record industry. There are only five major companies that operate in near totality of the music disseminated on the airwaves. The five
major companies operating locally are CBS, Chancellor, Clear Channel, Evergreen, and Infinity. Operating nationally are Capital Cities/ABC, CBS, Mutual and Unistar. These companies monitor listening patterns in 50 major cities and determine the playlist and radio formats based interest and advertising dollars (Albarran, 1996). With the growing interest in urban music, there is a concerted effort to funnel artists and similar content from the record labels to the radio channels for dissemination of the politics of supply and demand. Similarly, the fact that middle class whites buy 67% of the rap music produced adds another dimension to the pressure to push out certain types of rap music for consumption by group distal to the creative core of hip hop (Kitwana, 2005). The television industry follows suit with the demands of the record and radio industry, forming a triangulation of centralized power which parasitically feeds on the creativity of, in this case black cultural production (George, 1988).

In the germinal work in the field of hip hop literature, Rose (1994) concludes that the artist is relegated to the will of the industry when subjecting himself or herself to the often unrealistic demands of the music industry. Rose states:

“Rap’s resistive, yet contradictory, positions were waged in the face of a powerful media-supported construction of black urban America as a source of urban social ills that threaten social order. Rappers’ speech acts are heavily shaped by music industry demands, sanctions, and prerogatives.” (p. 104)

This reality frames the discourse around the importance of creating outlets for artists to bypass the trappings and snares of the industry. No one is immune to the demands of an industry dedicated to the propagation and exploitation of a cultural commodity. These demands are assumed at the exchange of oftentimes one’s values system and beliefs in order
to sell records. In an introspective anthem of regret, Shawn “Jay Z” Carter (2006), arguably one of the greatest and richest (Forbes estimates his net worth at $1 Billion) rappers of all time, solemnly laments his inability to say what he desired to say in his career in the song entitled *Moment of Clarity*, assumingly due to industry pressure:

I dumb down for my audience  
(referring to his self-imposed simplifying of his lyrics)  
And double my dollars  
They criticize me for it  
Yet they all yell "Holla"  
If skills sold  
Truth be told  
I'd probably be  
Lyrically  
Talib Kweli (Talib Kweli is a conscious hip hop artist that is known for his positive content and skillful lyrics)  
Truthfully  
I wanna rhyme like Common Sense (Common as mentioned earlier is an artist who has not compromised his message of consciousness despite his lack of commercial appeal)  
(But I did five Mill (read made a lot of money for his gangster image))  
I ain't been rhyming like Common since  
When your sense got that much in common  
And you been hustling since  
Your inception  
Fuck perception  
Go with what makes sense  
Since  
I know what I'm up against  
We as rappers must decide what's most important  
(Jay Z’s attempt at introducing the discourse of not compromising integrity as an artist)  
And I can't help the poor if I'm one of them  
So I got rich and gave back  
To me that's the win, win

At the end of the introspective soliloquy, he attempts to justify his compromise as an attempt to cash in on the industry through his defamatory lyrics and image by suggesting that
he did it in order to make money and give back to his community, the same community indirectly and negatively influenced by his lyrical content.

To complicate the discourse moving forward, the media deserves a share of the responsibility in assessing value or devalue, in many instances, to the culture and music (Kitwana, 2005). In a longitudinal decade-long study conducted by Koza (1999) assessing the three major media outlets, Newsweek, Time Magazine, and U.S. News and World Report, it shows that from 1990 to 2000, it was found that 98% of the stories written and reported on hip hop were negative in nature. The findings of this report begs to question the politics and partisan nature related to disseminating information on the culture and music of hip hop. Artists and the culture alike must take responsibility for its content and imagery, but they are not the sole proprietor of media portrayal in current popular culture.

IV. Global Hip Hop

Hip hop music and culture have become a globally significant force on the world stage and have been chronicled by the media, scholars and nearly every other outlet in which youth culture is critiqued (Basu & Lemelle, 2006). Hip hop’s global appeal dates back to the early 1980s when befittingly Afrika Bambaattaa traveled abroad in 1982 to France’ Le Bataclan Theatre spreading his message of “peace, unity, positivity” (p. 326). Bambaattaa also encouraged foreign artists to rap in their native tongues to reflect local reality. The three earliest countries that were majorly influenced by Bambaattaa’s message were France, Japan and Italy, respectively (Light, 1999). The culture in France embraced the new hip hop culture in the early 1980s and realized that they could not emulate the urban afrocentric culture of the
South Bronx. Japanese artists found ways as well to authenticate their artistry while being conscious of adhering to the core principles of the founders of hip hop at the same time.

“Lacking ghettos, culture wars, and acknowledged racial disharmony, Japanese Youth relate hip hop as the soundtrack to international fashion. Blackness is a commodity on the streets of Tokyo” (p. 364). Similarly, as hip hop spread on the airwaves across the world, youth around the world studied the art form, culture and traditions of American hip hop to carve out a niche that was acceptable to their native countries, lending local authenticity to the newly grafted customs. Socio-linguist Alim (2009) suggests that the replication of hip hop culture and language lends to a collective mind state that he calls “The Hip Hop Nation” or “The Global Hip Hop Hood. Mitchell (2002), a European Scholar/Author refers to this global acculturation of hip hop as “Global Noise.”

Not only did hip hop spread to select countries such as France, Japan and Italy, but others have also adopted the urban practices of hip hop culture such as South Asians (Sharma, 2004), East Asians (Wong, 2004), Latinos (Rivera, 2003) and Middle Easterners (Maira, 2000), just to name a few. Hip hop’s influence has permeated the globe and has retrofitted into local youth culture in even the most remote of locations across the planet. In places such as Brazil and in rural communities in Africa, the language and the inherent resistance in the culture has resulted in the empowerment of young people from all walks of life throughout the world, equipping them with the tools to speak out against injustice and challenge the status quo (Spady, et. al, 2006). Runell-Hall (2011) suggests that not only have the political possibilities through hip hop been adopted by the masses, but the negative aspects of exploitative
commercialism have also taken root in many countries abroad, leading to violence, misogyny and other oppressive forms of messaging and imagery in various foreign countries.

One example which stands out as a direct archetypal occurrence of a nation which has been affected detrimentally by the harsh realities of some commercial rap occurred in the mid-1990s during the infamous East-Coast/West-Coast beef mentioned earlier in the text which occurred in America. This beef simultaneously affected an urban community tens of thousands of miles away in the ghettos of Post-Apartheid South Africa. Osumare (2007) posits that youth in the impoverished communities in Johannesburg took sides in the American East-Coast/West-Coast conflict by joining rival gangs which adorned the shirts of either Tupac Shakur or Christopher “Biggie Smalls” Wallace, the two progenitors of the media inflated coastal rivalry. The participants themselves shouldered the blame for the rise in violence originating on another continent; however, Osumare (2007) goes on to suggest that the Apartheid government has to assume a share of the cause for the rash of spurious conflicts. He posits that the Apartheid government banned all music that was perceived as empowering or liberating only to promote gangsta music which endorsed senseless violence and black on black criminality. As on the social and political landscape of America in which conscious versus commercial wage a tireless philosophical war, South Africa experienced this paradigm with the aforementioned scenario and its conscious thrust to disengage from social deprivation as well. Studying the political and conscious efforts of many activists and artist from America, South African youth, in a direct response to the violence, created a resistance music known as Kwaito. Kwaito music, like its American conscious counterpart, spoke of peace and critiqued the oppressive social structure in South Africa.
In a similar fashion to domestic hip hop, global hip hop is ever-evolving and ever-changing. The challenge for the global scene in terms of its ability to maintain the core values of culture is that it is not only decades removed from oneself, but it is literally foreign in its articulation to find the messages and views of empowerment readily relevant in the wake of so many adversities to the founders’ belief in “peace, unity and positivity.” Afrika Bambaattaa, long before the onslaught of hip hop as a multibillion dollar enterprise that would test the very social structures of youth culture around the world, believed in the power of hip hop to change lives not only in his own neighborhood, but also abroad. His commitment to changing lives had no color and no geographic border, and this is clearly represented in his naming of the first and longest enduring hip hop organization *The Universal Zulu Nation*. Many who have embraced hip hop culture domestically and abroad have been positively and negatively affected both by its power to be a voice for those who need an advocate, and also by its driving force to oppress and destroy. From the closest of proximity to the most distal of locales, hip hop through an infinite stream of energy and ideas, is breaking all barriers and boundaries, forging new traditions as predecessors conform to it. That which remains is the experimental frontier of endless possibilities all made possible by this art form called hip hop.
CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

A. Statement of the Problem

Hip hop culture has long been considered the bane of current American society (Staple, 1994), suggesting that the culture of hip hop is what is driving youthful decadence in popular culture. Around issues of misogyny, violence, materialism and other negative messages in many of the songs produced in hip hop culture currently, many scholars retort that superfluous assessments fail to ascertain the depth and breadth of the culture from which the messages and images are disseminated (Perkins, 1996; Dyson, 1996; Bynoe, 2004; Foreman & Neal, 2004; Watkins, 2005). However, Dyson (2007) posits that when analyzing hip hop culture and its music that one must be cautious not to deal in the binary of good and bad. This dialectic approach, according to Dyson, omits the intricacies of form and content associated with the multivariate messages within hip hop.

To complicate the discourse moving forward, the media deserves a share of the responsibility in assessing value or devalue in many instances, to the culture and music (Kitwana, 2005). In a longitudinal decade-long study conducted by Koza (1999), it shows that from 1990 to 2000, assessing the three major media outlets, Newsweek, Time Magazine, and U.S. News and World Report, 98% of the stories written and reported on hip hop were negative in nature. The findings of this report beg to question the politics and partisan nature related to disseminating information on the culture and music of hip hop. Artists and the culture alike
must take responsibility for its content and imagery, but is not the sole proprietor of media portrayal in current popular culture.

Bynoe (2004) lays out a compelling argument for the proactive and preemptive actions of the hip hop community to not only combat the pervasive images and messages in hip hop, but to engage needs within the community. Hip hop has answered that call with the creation of many hip hop-based organizations specifically created to address many issues confronted by the hip hop and post-hip hop generation. In the midst of scurrilous attacks on the hip hop community by authors like McWhorter (2008) who suggests that “the notion of hip hop being committed to political change is mistaken and is only devoted to dissing authority for its own sake” (p.18), hip hop organizations have arisen over the past two decades speaking to the needs of the most disenfranchised and underrepresented (Runell-Hall, 2011). However, hip hop organizations fail to get credit for their efforts and accomplishments because of their lack of documentation, according to Kitwana (2008). It is the intent of this research to address this problem.

With the inception of a plethora of grassroots hip hop-based organizations over the past two decades, the programmatic focus of the organizations have ranged from anti-violence, self-esteem building, community empowerment and education, amongst other things (Rose, 2008). These organizations have helped fuel the movement towards educators utilizing hip hop in the classroom, while creating new and more effective ways of understanding hip hop culture, validating youth identity, increasing media literacy and advancing critical pedagogy. One analysis of hip hop education as it exists currently is that there is very little continuity between one methodology for implementation and other. Furthermore, there is little to no cohesion
between educator and organization which creates, mitigates, and assesses the effectiveness of hip hop education. The Urban Teachers Network, which is an interactive multimedia site for the exchange and support of hip hop pedagogy and pedagogues alike, will be assessed for effectiveness in alternative education. This research is an effort towards that end.

**B. Introduction**

This chapter recounts the research design and methodology utilized to validate this study. I will discuss the research design and rationale, source of data and data collection, and analysis and interpretation process. The study will be conducted using a qualitative method; more specifically an oral history focus to extrapolate individual accounts of a national and international phenomenological inception and growth of the organization Hip Hop Congress and their creation of the Urban Teachers Network as well as its assessment as a pedagogical tool of student improvement. In addition to the firsthand accounts of the history, primary and secondary historical sources and artifacts will be triangulated to create a richly contextualized data.

**C. Research Questions**

This research examination is centered on the historical accounting, pedagogical and programmatic efforts, and assessment of the Urban Teachers Network of grassroots hip hop organization, Hip Hop Congress. It is important to note that in examining the essential elements of the philosophy and growth of Hip Hop Congress and its utilization of critical hip hop
pedagogy through the Urban Teachers Network, that this study has endeavored to answer the following questions:

1) What is the history of Hip Hop Congress?
2) How has the history of the organization developed their philosophy of preserving positive aspects of hip hop culture while refuting current negative trends?
3) How does Hip Hop Congress define hip hop pedagogy and how is it implemented into programmatic efforts?
4) What is the Urban Teachers Network and how do educators within Hip Hop Congress utilize it as a tool of empowerment and as an enhancement in their classroom activities?

D. Research Design and Rationale

For this research, I have chosen to employ the qualitative research method to ascertain answers to the aforementioned questions. The usefulness of utilizing qualitative inquiry assists in: “a) participating in the setting, b) observing directly, c) interviewing in depth, and d) analyzing documents and materials” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 97). Additionally, approaching the subject from a qualitative perspective allows for enriched narratives of personal accounts and multiple views of common events and occurrences. Furthermore, according to Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2004), “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p.1), creating continuity between the recollecting, recording and retelling of events through interview.

The utility of the qualitative method is enhanced with the strategy of the implementation of an oral history methodology. Yow (2005) contests that oral history creates a composite which tells a rich narrative of a subject or community: “Individual testimony
incorporates different aspects of experience at any moment and these moments can be arranged chronologically to reveal development” (p. 13). The oral history method focuses on the interpersonal relationship that must be forged between the researcher in the role of participating oral historian and the narrator. While oral history oftentimes uncovers identity and cultural issues, political concerns are diverged through the reconstruction of the methodology. Through the methodology of oral history, the focus of empowerment and the development of inter-subjectivity engenders the term ‘shared authority’ when describing the relationship between the oral historian and the individuals from a particular community that share their past (Thompson, Frisch & Hamilton, 1994). This method is apropos to researching the history of such a subject as Hip Hop Congress and their functioning.

E. Source of Data and Data Collection

The participants of this study are all members of the hip hop collective, Hip Hop Congress. All have taken an active role in helping to develop and facilitate growth within the ranks of the organization. Hip Hop Congress is the largest hip hop organization in existence today. Boasting over thirty chapters from six different regions nationally and two chapters internationally, Hip Hop Congress has grown exponentially since its origins in 1993. The growth and continuance of this organization is incredible considering its young age, but what is equally if not more impressive is that the organization has grown without any funding beyond dues, which are oftentimes not mandated. Additionally, the organization does nationally-recognized grassroots work within many inner-city and rural communities, empowering through the use of
hip hop culture. These efforts are worth chronicling and the programs are equally worthy of assessment, particularly the Urban Teachers Network.

My sample is an amalgamation of subjects from various socio-cultural backgrounds, which make up the Executive Board and the leadership council of Hip Hop Congress. The commonality is their self-identify as part of the Hip Hop Generation as defined by Kitwana (2002), as being born between the years of 1965 and 1984. Other similarities include all involved with leadership have been with the organization at least 5 years or more and have worked in various capacities to ensure the growth and development of the organization and its programming. The differences are vast. Out of the 10 executive board members recruited, 6 are men and 4 are women. The board members locale varies: 4 of them are from the Midwest, 4 are from the West coast, 1 is from the Southern region and the other is from the East coast. Vocationally, 5 are educators, 2 are in private industry and the other 3 are involved in the music industry. The racial make-up is 4 African Americans, 4 Caucasians, 1 Asian and 1 of South-Asian descent.

Beyond the recruitment of the executive board and leadership council, I have decided to also recruit 5 educators within the membership body of Hip Hop Congress who actually teach within schools and utilize hip hop pedagogy in conjunction with a typical curriculum. These educators will have had to have used the Urban Teachers Network to have shared ideas and implemented ideas from the group. The teachers, in order to add substantive data to the research, will have had to have assessed the hip hop curriculum and the effectiveness of that curriculum with their students. Additional questions will be asked of the educations, beyond
those submitted to the executive board. The educators will be recommended by the executive board and leadership council.

F. Data Analysis

This qualitative research study is grounded in the methodology of oral history. In addition to oral history a phenomenological approach has been taken to glean specific messages from the responses given by those interviewed. Archival data, participatory observations and direct observations have been employed to inform the approach to interviewing in an attempt to ascertain individual accounts of Hip Hop Congress’ history and to assess how hip hop provides space for critical pedagogy, utilized by the programmatic element of Hip Hop Congress. The commencement of this inquiry begins with utilizing Nvivo to encode the written responses given by the interviewees. Nvivo is a qualitative research tool that allows for the thematic grouping of unconstructive data such as interviews, surveys and other information.

Utilizing Nvivo to assist in the construction of thematic groupings will enable threads of logic and commonality to be threshed out in the process of ascertaining related data from the interview. Developing themes will come from the discussions on the “Historical Context and its Praxis” section of the discussion of the current literature on hip hop pedagogy. Some of the themes that will be considered as areas of thematic consideration will be: “departure from traditional educational banking concept,” “critique of music,” “ parsing out messages,” “new dimensions of identity development,” “interpersonal growth,” “increase of confidence and willingness to participate in educational process,” and “the effectiveness of hip hop pedagogy in
curricular and extra-curricular space.” In addition to the vertical grouping of themes, other data such as field notes from conferences, email communication and other primary documents will be put in Nvivo to gather constructed data.

Within the original interview questions, there is one question which solicits the contact information of educators who implement the programming of hip hop pedagogical curricula. I will compare the responses of both the executive board of Hip Hop Congress and leadership group with the responses of the educators. It is my intention to utilize grounded theory (Foss & Waters, 2007; Charmaz, 2006) to encode and analyze chunks of data. Runell-Hall (2011) suggests that the primary focus of the grounded theory is executed in four steps: a) discovering codes which identify “anchors” for the data collection; b) creation of concepts (which is a gathering of codes that are comparable and can be used to generate the data which can be grouped into categories); c) organization of categories (or themes) into similar concepts used to generate theory; and d) formation of theory acts as explanatory schema to illuminate the subject of the research (Foss & Waters, 2007).

**G. Identifying Themes and Topics for Analysis**

Hip hop pedagogy has grown exponentially since 1987 when a master’s student who will become known to the politically vigilant sector of hip hop as Davey D. (David Cook) would complete his master’s thesis on the importance of hip hop as a tool of education (Runell-Hall, 2009). His assertion of hip hop as a pedagogy will spark hip hop pedagogical theorists such as David Stovall, Jeff Duncan-Andrade, Earnest Morrell and Marc Lamont Hill, to name just a few. Their theoretical ruminations on the potential of hip hop in the classroom can be seen as a
marriage between their self-identification as part of the hip hop culture and forward-thinking educational reformists who called for teachers to think beyond the prescript of institutionalized educational methodologies. Pedagogical theorists and teacher educators such as Gloria Ladson-Billings and Bell Hooks challenged the incongruity in the education of students of color and simultaneously imbued a subsequent generation of theorists raised through the lens of civil rights gains to reflect their reality and culture into the educational process. This theoretical process of validating hip hop in the classroom and advancing the praxis of hip hop curricula has borne fruit as they have inspired yet another subsequent generation of theorists and scholars, all unwavering in their resolve to create a better classroom where difference is celebrated and leveraged as a tool of education.

This section is a literature review of prominent scholarly research within the field of hip hop education, which argues the overwhelmingly positive effects of hip hop culture within the classroom. Each study tangibly conveys proof of the student-centered value of education on a hip hop elixir. The data is robust and informs the progress educator that there is merit in this cultural phenomenon within the educational process. After completing this literature review, it was apparent that there were multiple themes that were embedded within the text to be extrapolated and utilized as the basis for thematic enquiry. Themes such as interpersonal student growth, musical critique, new dimensions of identity, message decoding, critiques of dominant culture, self-empowerment, community building, exploration of racial binaries (blackness and whiteness), amongst others, will be engaged as the basis for the creation of questions for educators within the Urban Teachers Network to assess the validity of research within the field of hip hop education.
The past 30 years has seen hip hop transform from a burgeoning local art form to the harbinger of current popular culture and a billboard mainstay; now it is being utilized in the classroom for its content and pedagogical importance. Educators, artists, novice and others have utilized hip hop as education in various capacities over the last three decades, informally educating through public pedagogy and formally as complements to traditional pedagogies (Duncan & Morrell, 2008). According to Runell & Diaz (2007), hip hop education is being used to teach everything from literature, writing, mathematics, history, social studies, physical education, and social justice education in all levels of the K-16 pipeline. One reason for the commutable nature of hip hop as a subject matter is according to Watkins (2005), hip hop is a self-reflective counter-narrative which allows the subject to see themselves within the subject matter of that which is taught.

Perry (2004) suggests that hip hop as a pedagogical tool is effective because it critiques dominant social structures, which has the power to equip students with the ability to look at many societal issues such as racism, classism and sexism from a structural perspective. Not everyone agrees with hip hop’s utilization within the classroom. Educators and some artists alike, for multiple reasons, feel that education is better served without the utility of hip hop culture and music as a part of it. Despite the position one values within the debate of hip hop’s effectiveness within the classroom, few can refute that hip hop as subject matter creates deeper connections between students and teachers within an academic setting while galvanizing student interest in the educational process.
Hip Hop Education (HHE), according to Runell-Hall (2011), traces its origins back to a master’s thesis written by hip hop activist and artist Davey D. In his thesis entitled “The Power of Hip Hop” submitted in 1987, Davey D. proclaimed prophetically how hip hop, less than a decade removed from its commercial debut on radio waves, would be instrumental to the educational process of urban youth. Three years later, another pioneering assessment of hip hop’s utility within the cannon came from doctoral student Georgia Smith, a graduate from Texas Women’s University. The dissertation was entitled “The Effects of Using Rapping as a method to teaching directional map reading skills to African American third-graders.” Another forward-thinking educator who will go on to be portrayed in the human interest film Dangerous Mind (1995), Louanne Johnson, taught inner-city high school youth English using Public Enemy lyrics. In the movie, she is portrayed by Michelle Pfeiffer, a teacher who taught the course analyzing Bob Dylan lyrics, purposely omitting the utilization of hip hop in the classroom for commercial appeal (Runell-Hall, 2011).

The theory on hip hop’s use within the classroom turned praxis in the early to mid-1990s and shortly after became institutionalized with the creation of hip hop-centered academic non-profit organizations. The founding of the Blackout Arts Collective in 1997, which works within schools, prisons and community centers, promoted education and activism through hip hop culture. Since its inception in New York, the organization has spread throughout the east coast and southern cities such as New Orleans, Atlanta and Houston. Another non-profit organization which has been successful in conducting hip hop-centered programming is the University of Hip Hop which was founded in Chicago in 2000. This hip hop institution began as a summer initiative in 1997 and by the year 2000, it was chartered as an
institution in several cities at grammar and high schools, universities, and community centers across the country and in Poland.

The International Association of Hip Hop Education (IAHHE) is based in Washington, D.C. and was founded in 2006 to assure the continued worldwide growth and development of hip hop and hip hop education. The IAHHE initiates programs which nurtures the understanding and appreciation of the legacy of hip hop culture. In addition, the organization provides leadership to educators in regards to educational resources and curricula for teachers and practitioners alike. Similar to the IAHHE, the Hip Hop Association was founded in 2003 to assist and service educators and others committed to working with youth through the medium of hip hop. The Hip Hop Education program, which is an educational auxiliary of the Hip Hop Association, exists as a programmatic tool to promote self-empowerment and community building through education.

In addition to the institutional non-profits, hip hop’s utilization within the classroom setting is currently being critiqued and assessed for its effectiveness on student populations as a means of leveraging the power of hip hop as a pedagogical tool for learning. Scholars such as Campbell (2007), Stovall (2006), Weinstein (2007), Maercadal-Sabbagh (2004), Hallman (2009) and others, all suggest that hip hop can be used in the classroom and assessed by measuring its utility on a variety of subject areas. Campbell (2007) critiques the effectiveness of utilizing hip hop in college writing classes that explore the binary of blackness and whiteness in popular culture. Very similarly, Stovall (2006) assesses hip hop pedagogy within the confines of the social studies classroom. He observes that its usage departs from the traditional educational
banking concept, which detracts from student critical assessment. Stovall goes on to suggest that hip hop pedagogy allows students to critique the music that they are familiar with and forces them to parse out the messages that often they are not conscious of.

Weinstein (2007) assesses her students’ formation of identity through poetry writing created in and out of the classroom. She found that imbuing canonical writing with hip hop or popular cultural context invoked new dimensions of identity development for many of her students when challenged with the assignment to create poetry utilizing a hip hop aesthetic. Her views echo the sentiment of Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2002), in that students grow interpersonally when creative writing is enmeshed with both traditional and non-traditional subject matter. Teaching in urban schools, much like Weinstein, Mecadal-Sabbagh (2004) displays empirically that “at-risk” students achieve when hip hop meets the written curricula of language arts. Mecadal-Sabbagh conveys the increase of confidence and willingness to participate in sharing creative writing when students are spurned to write from emotion. In addition to the benefits the students received, she found that she was also spurned to actively learn to engage the students as an active participant in the lessons as well.

The findings of all the aforementioned scholars and teachers are important in the fact that they all did assessment within the classroom as active participants of the daily treatments utilized, and their work reflects an ethnographic approach. This ethnographic approach enables their research to speak in an active voice with in-depth personal narrative, because of their participatory role in the process of discovery. One of the collective downsides to this approach is that it often renders findings subject to partiality because of the participatory role of the
teacher/scholar. However, Hallman assessed the student/teacher interaction within the classroom in which hip hop was utilized to bolster “at-risk” students’ literacy. The finding were comparable to those of Mecadal-Sabbagh (2004) and Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2002), in that students were more engaged and displayed significant increases in learning after participating in hip hop-infused literacy curricula.

Beyond the common usage of hip hop within the literary field (creative writing), lyrical content analysis, social critiques and teaching rhyming skills, hip hop education and scholarship have been and are being used to creatively teach a myriad of other subjects. Hip hop has been used to enhance theatre programs at schools in K-12 and in many universities (Hoch, 2007). In addition, Kajitani (2006) found that some innovative teachers are capitalizing on hip hop’s ability to assist in the memorizing of mathematic time tables for children. Hip hop dance classes are being taught in gym class as a way of “modernizing” gym class (Anthony, 2001). Another innovative way of re-tooling the educational process through the medium of hip hop is witnessed in the economics class for business students. Many teachers and professors are incorporating the structure of record labels into the classroom to teach the nuances of finance in a more practical and imaginative way (Morikawa, 2005).

Grades K-12 have found considerable uses for hip hop pedagogy in opening the ideas and minds of young people to new dimensions of learning; however, it must be noted that there are just as many programs being utilized in the same manner within the ivory towers of higher educational institutions all over the United States of America and abroad (Runnell & Diaz, 2007). Hip hop is currently being taught in more than 300 college classrooms worldwide.
(Hamanci, 2007). Since the first course taught in 1991, traditionally housed within Black Studies departments on many college and university campuses, hip hop education expanded as a pedagogical tool within various subjects.

**H. Archival Research**

As equally important research element as the qualitative method to this research project is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the historical artifacts and archival data of Hip Hop Congress. Many of the effects include e-mails, written statements, meeting minutes, conference proceedings, concert fliers and budget sheets, programmatic data and articles written and submitted to the national website. Archival data is important in informing the researcher of detailed history that often may be omitted because of its perceived insignificance or lack of memory. Sloboda, McKentin and Kozel (2005) elaborate on more advantages of utilizing: “The use of such data has many advantages. Archival data are both inexpensive and generally easy to access... In addition, archival data are standardized and routine, they can serve as a significant part of a more comprehensive surveillance system” (p. 65).

The analysis of the archival data will focus on the historical perspective of the organization including the following themes: what is hip hop activism, the founding of Hip Hop Congress, the development of the chapters, the growth of Hip Hop Congress, community work and national initiatives. Subsequent thematic questions will be addressed through the researching of the archival data in assessing how Hip Hop Congress has responded to such issues as: the rejection of misogyny in hip hop culture, hip hop in public education, electoral
politics and the hip hop generation(s), union activism and the hip hop alliance and violence prevention. These themes and others will be discussed in the subsequent section of the research.
CHAPTER 4
HIP HOP PEDAGOGY: DEFINITION, STUDIES & THEORIES

A. Defining Hip Hop Pedagogy

Fueled by the necessity to reform an educational system that has failed a segment of America’s student population, researchers and educators who grew up within the culture of hip hop began to make the connection between culturally-relevant education and student re-engagement. Furthermore, compelled by the ascendance of not only hip hop culture but also globalization, multiculturalism and technology, a paltry group of educators and cultural workers forged a path to enhance the learning environment for the most vulnerable in the K-16 pipeline. The initial wave of artists, educators and social justice proponents started out as a small cohort. From the early 1990s until today, the ranks of hip hop educators have swelled into the hundreds, ushering in new theories and practices that interface hip hop culture with traditional curricula. “Simply stated, hip hop based education can be defined as the use of hip hop elements as curricular and pedagogical resources” (Gosa & Fields, 2010, p.2).

“Today, we have hundreds of teachers, artists, scholars, social workers, social entrepreneurs, and administrators in K-12 and institutions of higher learning that are able to serve as an inter-generational bridge. Whether Hip Hop culture is used inside the classroom to each a subject, serve as a hook to teach a lesson, or as an academic subject, itself, vocation, or art form, teachers from all backgrounds are integrating it into their curriculum as a liberatory, critical, and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical tool.” (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011)

Simply stated, hip hop pedagogy, like other liberatory disciplines serve to reach students where they are pedagogically, while reflexively empowering adolescents with student-centered
curricula and practices. The desired result of many of these programs are to lead to the reduction to recidivism within the masses of marginalized adolescence, while improving grades, environmental conditions within schools and amongst peers.

This pedagogy which spans the rigor and breadth of interdisciplinary fields, when incorporated with current educational platforms and economic reform movements, can help strengthen urban and other educational systems. It has been shown that when the elements (rapping, DJing, graffiti, breakdancing, fashion and language) are incorporated into a curriculum, student motivation, critical media literacy, fostered critical consciousness and transmitted disciplinary knowledge are imparted. One of the strengths of hip hop education is its ability to be salient across disciplines and to be a utility across every level of education. With that said, it can conceivably be touted a weakness in the same regard. Hip hop based education or hip hop pedagogy (they have been used interchangeably) is very organic in its usage, meaning there is no set standard and even fewer duplicated practices in using hip hop within a curriculum. Efforts are currently under way “to study programs and strengthen and replicate the best practices and models, develop standards, and professionalize the field of hip hop education” (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011, p. 4) by scholars and others. The subsequent contextualization displays in concrete ways in which hip hop education, hip hop pedagogy or hip hop based education is utilized in various programmatic formats.

When reviewing existing programs, several terms emerge in way of explaining the use of hip hop within the classroom. Terms such as Hip Hop Pedagogy, Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy, Culturally Relevant Hip Hop Pedagogy and Hip Hop Curricula all frame the theoretical discussion
around what this thing is. Mostly, it is witnessed that all the terms are used interchangeably to convey the concept of hip hop based education. It is often applicable to assess the variance in the labeling by the users of the similar terms. For example, scholars such as Dimitriadis (2001), Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2005), Hill (2009) and Petchaeur (2009), all professors, utilize the “critical” theoretical grounding to position hip hop education within liberatory education. Educators such as Noguera and Zarazua (2007), both high school teachers, are more inclined to use the term hip hop education in explaining hip hop within the classroom. The following information is an attempt to thresh out these suppositions and contextualize the concepts to extrapolate meaning from the terms.

*Hip Hop Pedagogy* is commonly used to describe the totality of hip hop within the classroom or any lessons that are taught utilizing hip hop or rap as a context. Beyond the infusion of hip hop into some sort of pedagogical platform, hip hop pedagogy also refers to the style of teaching implemented by a teacher and a strategic effort by that teacher to raise the “critical consciousness” and “cultural awareness” through a social justice lens or perspective (Stovall, 2006). *Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy* diverges slightly by focusing primarily on marginalized groups, as a school process for blacks, Latino, those in high poverty school environments and even teachers seek empowerment through the educational process. Gosa & Fields (2010) postulate that Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy serves three distinct functions within a curricula of empowerment: development of critical thinking with in students, encouragement of the infusion of non-traditional texts and teaching tools for critique and lastly, as an emancipatory tool for connecting social ill to larger structures of oppression.
The first function of *Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy*, elaborated by Gosa & Fields (2010), is the Freirean concept of liberatory education parsed out in his critically acclaimed book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2009). Paulo Freire’s method of deliberate development of student’s critical thinking through aggressive and progressive exchanges and relevant lessons will be discussed additionally in subsequent portions of the document. Beyond this point, *Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy* curtails the process of passive transmission of information or what is also known as banking. Secondly, *Critical Hip Hop Based Education* uses such unconventional educational tools as rap videos or movies and even viral videos to not only drive home about popular culture, but to have students assess and analyze that which is sustained in their worlds. In this exchange the repressive method of banking is negated by true inquiry and knowledge development. This concept of schooling is firmly affixed on a social justice concept assisting students and teachers with a process and a lens in which to navigate societal structures of injustice.

*Culturally Relevant Hip Hop Pedagogy* is very similar to the previous concept *Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy*, in the fact that they both challenge the societal structures that may oppress, while at the same time deconstructing hierarchical structures. Hill (2009) suggests that beyond the ability of culturally relevant hip hop pedagogy to reduce the distal positioning between the social world of youth and students in the classroom, *Culturally Relevant Hip hop Pedagogy* incorporates the interdisciplinary aspects of standard curricula and black diasporic culture which begot hip hop. In conjunction, the enrichment of cultural relevance facilitates the positive and synergetic relations between students and educators (Emdin, 2010). Decenters of the theories culturally relevant pedagogy and critical pedagogy retort that both are based
around the assumption that the achievement gaps of minority students are predicated on a “cultural mismatch” or a disconnect between cultural identity and current school culture. This position has been well-documented to be the case within certain segments of the educational pipeline. Much of the literature which Hip Hop Education is based upon is around the premise that underachievement, particularly by those in high poverty schools, which are overwhelmingly black, Latino and poor whites, experience a daily cultural mismatch, creating a culture of conflict. The concept of a cultural mismatch simply challenges the prescript value of devaluing of youth culture within the school and classroom. The thread of consistency in these theories culminates around Hip Hop education as a sharp and preemptive tool to chip away the hard and fastened cultural rules which systemically fail marginalized students.

If the aforementioned theories were metaphorically artisans or painters, the Hip Hop Curricula would be what they create masterpieces with. In other words, the implementations of the theories are set in play through the hip hop curriculum. *The hip hop curriculum* is often and simply labeled as a lesson plan infused with hip hop culture (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Or often times it is referred to as rap centric lesson plans (Ladson-Billings, 2009). However one may describe it, the description must be scaffold on the foundation that beyond merely the inclusion of hip hop philosophies and theories in the lessons, hip hop curricula is a liberatory curricula. One might view these infusions of culture as a means of not only grafting cultural identity into the traditional canon, but also as a means of creating cognizant citizens; hence, challenging the assumed position of subordinates in society. One must also make the connection to what might be considered hip hop curricula’s predecessor, the liberatory curricula of reconstruction black southern schools.
In the book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Scott (1990) lays the foreground for the discussion on how lesson of subordinate groups in many societies for the young was intended for the purpose of clandestinely teaching subsequent generations to challenge the system. Scott ruminates that resistance was taught in many ways from songs, to stories and other ways that were virtually hidden from the dominant group, but found itself being planted as a seed to one day bring forth fruit of independence and self-actualization. This theory is furthered through the concrete example of the pre-desegregated schools of the south in the work of Anderson (1988), *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935*. Anderson lays out the position that blacks, directly after slavery, struggled to put together a formative education that would not only espouse the liberatory ideas of emancipation, but would advance the cause of true citizenship. These methods were advanced through the curricula of these black southern schools between the years of 1860 and the mid-1930s. One must draw the connection between the curricula of the universal black schools in the south and the curricula of hip hop education. Both can be seen as politically charged as Beane (1997 & 2007) and Apple (2006) have argued of the universal schools. However, beyond just the simplistic notion that the schools and their curricula are just politically based, one might argue that they are equally imbued with indigenous cultural resistance to hegemony. This is the basis of hip hop curricula.

The programmatic implementation of Hip Hop Based Education can be categorized into an amalgamation of four interconnected areas: national hip hop education initiatives, supplementary hip hop education programs, not-for-profit, and hip hop education products. All four programmatic areas are imbedded in the process of pushing hip hop based education in
different means to consumers, communities and on national platforms, all for the betterment of students.

“Motivated by the same concerns, a broad range of non-profit, and government agencies that are designed to advance education and employment, reduce juvenile recidivism, and improve environmental and health outcomes among underserved and marginalized communities, now populate the national landscape. These initiatives employ a range of strategies to accomplish their goals, including the use of standardized Hip-Hop-based curriculum and testing modules, student exchange programs, professional development workshops and seminars, media projects, social enterprise ventures, and the creation of new educational platforms on-and-offline.” (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011, p.5)

National Hip Hop Initiatives focus on creating cohesive programs that are implementable across the country. The necessity for hip hop education as a collective to create standards of operation and certifications is dependent on national hip hop initiatives to assist in this process of consolidation and improvement. Similarly, the efforts of Hip Hop Congress are equally important in this endeavor to lend validity to the process of incorporation. In an effort to energize national campaigns, “high profile celebrities and rappers, public intellectuals, charitable foundations, and politicians are utilized to address the schooling troubles of urban youth” (Gosa & Fields, 2010, p. 6). These high profile positions are designed to spread a message of the initiative and infuse enthusiasm around schooling and connect communities.

Supplementary Hip Hop Education Programs are mostly extra-curricular programs that consist of afterschool programs, community center based programs, summer camps and learning programs. These programs are found in community centers in cities all across the country. Supplementary Hip Hop Education Programs do not necessarily require a standard in curricula because the programs are not classroom sanctioned. Because the programs are extra-
curricular, great emphasis is placed on exhibiting the performative elements of hip hop and its culture, all to increase self-efficacy amongst students. This direct attention to student efficacy as a primary function of the program positions learning outcomes secondary. These types of programs are also designed to keep students and adolescents out of trouble and out of harm’s way in the streets.

Hip Hop Congress is one of many not-for-profit programs that utilize hip hop culture as a tool of empowerment for adolescents across the country. Other mentionable organizations that often times collaborate with Hip Hop Congress to do the work of the movement are the Hip Hop Association (H2Ed, H2A), International Association of Hip Hop Education (IAHHE), The Hip Hop Caucus Education Fund, Hip Hop for Life, Guerilla Arts Ink, and many others. The PENCIL Program has been very successful in linking business leaders and principals as a means of changing school culture through programs that solicit the buy-in from all aspects of the school eco-system. According to the website, in 2010, PENCIL boasted 370 PENCIL partnerships affecting over 80,000 students, providing guidance, support, workshops, technical assistance, training and materials. The website also boasts providing over 5 million dollars in man hours volunteered to the various hip hop based programs (PENCIL, 2011). According to Diaz, Fergus & Noguera (2011), “in the PENCIL sponsored schools, attendance and graduation rates improved, staff attrition rates decreased, parents became more engaged in their children’s education, and test scores rose.” The question that begs to be asked is how can that success be duplicated throughout the entire educational system? The answer is through standardized and duplicable efforts from the hip hop education community.
One clear and emerging method of securing cohesion across the vastly variant hip hop pathologies and pedagogies is to secure cohesion within the products disseminated on and about hip hop education. The fastest growing and most visible aspect of hip hop based education is in the Hip Hop Education Products created by a myriad of educators, teachers, scholars and others. In recent years, there has been a proliferation in the number of not-for-profit products on the market. Currently there are study guides, children’s videos, flash cards, CDs, hip hop themed children’s books, web based learning tools and many other hip hop based learning tools. These products show the innovation of the hip hop generation to not only make hip hop in various fun and educational forms accessible, but generate funds for the hip hop educational movement simultaneously. If the learning aids are not sufficient, there are a growing number of hip hop education consultants that aid schools and school districts every year through retreats, trainings and workshops. Hip hop is reaching the masses and making preemptive moves in the name of reform and empowerment (Hill, 2009).

B. Hip Hop Pedagogical Studies

Hip Hop pedagogy has undergone three distinct phases: 1) The utilization of hip hop music to educate or edutainment; 2) The inception of hip hop in the classroom; and 3) Efforts to consolidate and standardize hip hop pedagogy as a national platform. Hip Hop pedagogy, according to Runell-Hall (2011), is in the stage of consolidation and standardization. It is important to use words like “standardize” very loosely when referring to the pedagogical force that was created to reform educational standardization in the way of testing and method of teaching and leveraging of sound policies and programs. The utilization of this word is more
about improving the state of education through the culture of hip hop for the betterment of students everywhere, and less about duplicating current modes of educational banking. Towards this end, a compilation of program assessments are subsequently reported as an illustration of the potency of hip hop education in resolving the crisis of urban education.

In 2010, under the progressive leadership of Hip Hop Education (H2ED) and The Hip Hop Association (H2A), the creators of the book *The Hip-Hop Education Guidebook* (2007) and the New York University’s Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (Metro Center) created the most comprehensive study on hip hop education to date. The study is befittingly entitled *Re-Imagining Teaching and Learning: A Snapshot of Hip-Hop Education* (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011). The collective utilized their national influence and credibility to survey nearly 300 participants, programs and courses. Over 200 participants took the online survey while the rest of the data was gleaned through internet searches, press and journal articles, theses and dissertations. The data was then indexed into a data consisting of age ranges and ethnicities of the students served or demographic data, number of students served, location and length of program existence, programmatic partnerships and funders and information on resourcing, personnel and staffing. Most of the aforementioned programs operated in a silo, unaware of existing programs within a very close vicinity.

Not only did this national hip hop educational assessment act as an effort towards policy making and standardization, but it also served as a database or registry. Furthermore, the study performed served as a conduit between often underfunded and fledgling programs to pool resources and strengthen ideas and practices.
“We seek to facilitate dialogue and inspire the existing and new wave of educators, teaching artists, researchers, administrators, policy makers, social entrepreneurs, and funders to work together to build up this promising field and bring about efficient social and policy reform. It is imperative that we address the complexities of urban education as part of a national reform that will include modifications in curriculum, classroom/school environments. Staffing, and testing policies. In addition to providing a safe space for youth to learn, schools need to offer wrap-around social services (medical, human resources, housing) to students in low socioeconomic communities” (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011).

The results of the program show the expansiveness of hip hop based programs and the dedication of those who believe in the power of hip hop to change the future for those who may not see themselves with a future. The lessons reflect the creativity of those who through the very inventive essence of hip hop, as did the forefathers of hip hop before them, hedge a bet that teaching love and empowerment will change lives and change communities. The following echoes these engagements through not only the robust nature of the study but also the results of individuals on the frontline of this war to save children.

This research project is very important in that it surveys the students using these programs by age, race, and demographic. According to the survey, 81% or 150 programs serve youth between the ages of 14-18 years of age, while 115 programs serve youth between 19 and 22. The demographic shows that the majority of programs serve high school students primarily and a college age demography secondarily. It is hard to extrapolate if the 19-22 year old bracket are in institutions of higher learning or are part of community based hip hop programs. Hip Hop Congress has addressed these demographics by creating High School Chapters, College Chapters and Community Chapters. All three are to work together to implement programming for their locale. Racially, the report shows that nearly 84% of students in the programs are
Black (African American, African or Caribbean), 83% are Latino (Hispanic), 79% report being of mixed heritage, 61% white (Caucasian), 60% Asian American (Pacific Islander) and 38% Native American. The racial breakdown shows the potency of programming in urban areas amongst a fairly wide swath of students. However, in order to reach the smaller demographics such as Asian American and Native American, it may be important to develop new curriculum for rural areas and reservations to service all students upwards of the Black and Latino demographic (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011).

The core of hip hop culture consists of five elements: Graffiti, Breakdancing, Djaying, Emceeing, and the concept of knowledge or knowledge of self (Chang, 2005). It is rudimentary to understand that one or more of these elements must be present as the foundation of a hip hop curriculum based project or program. The question was posed within the questionnaire submitted to the participants of the study. The results are not surprising in terms of the priority affixed to the lessons and programs. 76% of the respondents touted Knowledge or Knowledge of Self as the key component of their program. The fifth element concept is coined and implemented by Kevin “Afrika Bambaata” Donovan within the culture. The programs conducted with the concept of Knowledge or Knowledge of Self range from the history and development of hip hop culture, community organizing, coalition building and social justice training. Emceeing and Spoken Word both ranked in the 73% of utilization in hip hop curricula and programs. Graffiti and B-boying and B-girling both ranked over 50% and hip hop entrepreneurship, beatboxing and Djaying all ranked above 40% of curricular basis (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011).
In order for the concept of hip hop education to be effective within the context of pedagogy, it must be integrated into curricular platform. Based upon data from the survey and literature reviews, the area of academic disciplines adjoined with hip hop based education include: English Language Arts, Entrepreneurship, Ethnic (Africana, Latino, etc.) Studies, Gender and Sexuality, Geography, Interdisciplinary Studies, Leadership/Experiential Knowledge, Math, Media/Technology, Performance, Science, Social Studies, Theatre/Drama, College Prep – all have been reported to successfully utilize hip hop within its lessons. Another section of hip hop contextual programming is labeling the activities conducted. Participants were asked to list the skill-building activity or activities most closely connected to common core learning standards; these activities included: Team building, Career development, Identity formation, Community Activism, Media Literacy-video/digital production, Graphic Design, Gaming, Storytelling, Mentoring/Tutoring, Cross comparative historical/cultural analysis, writing skills, oral skills/debate, problem-posing/solving and negotiating /diplomacy. These academic disciplines and the skill building activities implemented within them frame the discussion of hip hop’s usage within national programs (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011).

Programmatic data is necessary in ascertaining the strength and viability of these hip hop programs. The longevity of the programs ensures the effectiveness and sustainability of the initiative, most certainly projecting the ability for growth and transcendence over a period of time. The Re-Imagining Teaching and Learning: A Snapshot of Hip-Hop Education report (2011) shows that over 50% of the programs surveyed have been in existence between 2-5 years. A far less percentage has existed longer. 12% have existed more than 10 years, based upon the inception of hip hop based programs many of this 10% reported may be some of the
germinal programs in the field. Another 18% have existed 6-10 years, while the same percentage reflects programs launched within the last calendar year, indicating growth and forward progress. The survey shows that the newest and largest program generation is in New York City, secondly in the Bay Area. There has been very little programmatic growth in the Midwest and the South (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011).

Often times the assurance of the survival of these programs is based upon access to resources. Most of these programs are not-for-profits, depending on governmental or private funding to maintain. The project determines the programmatic budgets for and the allocation of those budgets across a wide range of courses and programs. Of the research gathered, 46% programs had a meager budget of $5,000 or less per year to implement programming. 21% report a budget $50,000 or more. All other program budgets fall in between these two monetary value. There is ultimately a disparity between budgetary allocations for hip hop programming; this is an area that needs assessing. Fundraising is another vital part of keeping many of these programs going. Hip Hop non-profits such as Word Beats and Life out of Washington, D.C., Urban Word NYC out of New York, Youth Speaks out of San Francisco, Hip Hop Theatre from New York and a few others have all been able to fundraise between $500,000 and 1.5 million dollars. These organizations and funders are vital in preserving ventures and sharing strategies that will help inform other non-profits of best practices.

Beyond these streams of revenue, most programs, 64% receive funding from partnerships with schools, parents and artists (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011).

On January 24, 2012, President Obama, in his State of the Union Address, laid out an aggressive strategy for the near future of the United States of America. In the address, Obama
spoke about the state of education, and set forth a fairly progressive vision for America’s
schools and its teachers. President Obama goes on to say:

“Challenges remain. And we know how to solve them... We know a good teacher can
increase the lifetime income of a classroom by over $250,000. A great teacher can offer
an escape from poverty to the child who dreams beyond his circumstance. Every person
in this chamber can point to a teacher who changed the trajectory of their lives.
Teachers matter. So instead of bashing them, or defending the status quo, let’s offer
schools a deal. Give them the resources to keep good teachers on the job, and reward
the best ones. And in return, grant schools flexibility: to teach with creativity and
passion; to stop teaching to the test.”

These words may be viewed by many as disturbing by many who ascribe to the status
quo, but to the small thoughtful cohort of hip hop educators these words may mean progress
and potential recognition for the work they do every day.

The work is not done for recognition, but to be recognized or acknowledged means
highlighting the proof positive work done through hip hop education, validating what President
Obama labels “teaching with creativity and passion.” It is unclear if the President was referring
to hip hop based education programs when he made his visionary statement during the State of
the Union Address, but his words are closely aligned with the trajectory of hip hop education.
The president may not be aware of many of the hip hop education programs and their
educators that have garnered national acclaim, such as one hip hop educator receiving the
“Educator of Distinction” award from the National Honor Society of Student Scholars. But if he
is hedging a bet on stemming the tide of education with alternative methods, he is making a
safe bet. The following are programs that have been statistically proven to have enriched
various aspects of urban education through hip hop pedagogy.
According to the *Re-Imagining Teaching and Learning: A Snapshot of Hip-Hop Education* report, 100 out of the 206 programs assessed reported “effective” in the evaluation of their programs (Diaz, Fergus & Noguera, 2011). Often, self-evaluations or analyses are not grounded in statistical data to validate the claims set forth by the perceived outcomes of the programs surveyed. The programs subsequently mentioned are data driven programs that initiates the discussion around the grounded efficacy of hip hop based education. One such program is the Denver, Colorado K-12 health and youth centered initiative called Rap Cool Health (RCH). This program delivers hope to inner-city adolescents, while helping to improve their health. Under the leadership of Diane Mulligan, RCH brings together corporate, social, and governmental agencies through hip hop music, dance and relevant demonstrations, aimed at teaching healthy lifestyle choices. Additionally, the program empowers adolescents to teach healthy lifestyles to their peers and loved ones. The data suggests that the program is effective in helping to prevent diabetes, obesity, heart attack, and stroke by not only teaching preventative practices, but also implementing research proven methods that enabled the students to retain information received through the program. According to Harlem Pilot Project’s longitudinal assessment of the program, the participants of the program retained 80% of RCH messages for over seven months. Supplementary studies are currently underway to statistically show that the participants are competently teaching their parents healthier modes of behavior.

The Fulfill The Dream (FTD) program is an initiative started by Professor Chris Slaton of University of Wisconsin. To date, the FTD curriculum is implemented in five Madison Wisconsin high schools. Funded and supported by the University of Wisconsin, this longitudinal study evaluates the development of leadership skills assumed because of the programming of the
FTD program. The platform is a ten week series of workshops utilizing music, media and other popular cultural attributes, among many other tools to help develop leadership skills and define steps to actualize their definition of “The Good Life,” according to the Good Life Foundation. The program has documented data-provided methodologies that speak to the effectiveness of the ten week program. The FTD program has facilitated the expansion program into four middle school classrooms in a Midwestern city. The results are conclusive: the program has demonstrated the improvement of social and academic standings in the areas of G.P.A., attendance and behavior. The average student G.P.A. has been shown to have improved a half a point in a ten week period. Data gleaned from interviews with parents, administrators, teachers and students show categorically that the betterment in the school environment and scholastically is an effect of the FTD program. More remarkably than these results, is the program employment within an alternative school for seniors. The end result of the program’s application occasioned the graduation of 100% of the seniors, a feat not achieved prior to the program.

The University of Chicago has a long-standing tradition of conducting critical and cutting edge research on adolescent behavior and development. The Black Youth Project: Attitudes and Behavior of Young Black Americans is another solid figures-driven study that focuses on the attitudes, actions, and decision-making of young African Americans in relations to popular culture and hip hop in particular. According to Dr. Cathy Cohen, the founder of the project, the study is to give voice to the group from which the origins and innovations in hip hop culture spawns. The project surveyed 1,590 Black, White, and Hispanic youth between the ages of 15 and 25 from across the country, querying their attitudes and affinity towards rap music and
videos. According the outcomes of the study suggests that 58% of Black youth, 45% of Hispanic youth and 23% of White youth listen to hip hop or rap music every day. Likewise, when survey on the frequency of rap videos view 25% of young Blacks, 18% of young Hispanics and 5% of young Whites daily watch rap videos, nearly five times that of young White viewers. When asked about hip hop programming viewed over the span of any week, 48% of Black adolescents reported engaging in hip hop programming several days a week. Hispanics reported at 35% and Whites at 12%. This project not only speaks for adolescents, particularly Black adolescents, but reflects the reality that hip hop shapes the world of a large percent of America’s youth and should be taken serious as a tool to effectively meet students where they are and develop excellence in many aspects of their lives utilizing the lens of hip hop culture.

C. Theoretical Grounding of Hip Hop Pedagogy

I. Theoretical Context of Hip Hop Pedagogy

Mark Lamont Hill (2009), in his ground breaking book *Beats, Rhymes + Classroom Life: Hip Hop Pedagogy + The Politics of Identity*, refers to the concept of Hip Hop Pedagogy as “Pedagogies with Hip Hop.” His belief that Hip Hop Pedagogy alone cannot stem the tide of miseducation is conveyed in his summation of the power of hip hop within the context of the classroom and the educational process:

“I am not suggesting that a rigid set strategies or curricula be transmitted and replicated. Such an approach only intensifies the de-skilling efforts of contemporary educational power brokers who offer prepackaged (in some cases even scripted) curricula in place of engaged, reflective, and context-specific pedagogy. Rather, I am suggesting that hip-hop-based educators and scholars move beyond esoteric theory and
romantic classroom anecdotes in order to develop a vision of hip hop pedagogy that takes seriously the importance of academic achievement.” (p.123)

Hill’s declaration is the germinal concept in Hip Hop Theory. The belief that Hip Hop can be infused into the standard curricula as a means of engagement and learning enhancement is what fuels the theorist in which this section covers. It is important to note that all of the aforementioned educators/scholars in all of their work completed, cultivates the over-arching work of predecessor theories of scholars such as Tricia Rose, Robin D. G. Kelley, Mark Anthony Neal, Michael Eric Dyson, and Todd Boyd, considered the vanguards of hip hop scholarship or the “New Black Intelligencia” (Hamilton, 2004) and are credited for the formative foundation of hip hop theory. Other germinal scholars such as Bakari Kitwana, Gwendolyn Pough, Joan Morgan and Kevin Powell are others who should be recognized for their contribution to hip hop philosophy and scholarship. The first book on hip hop was written by Tricia Rose in 1994. The book is entitled *Black Noise* and it will become the bedrock of scholarly renderings of a generation of academics who watched hip hop ascend from the streets of New York to its permeable state into the fabric of American popular culture and eventually onto the world stage.

Since the early scholarly offerings were rendered by the *New Black Intelligencia*, hip hop scholarship has morphed into a pedagogy which drew on the writings of scholars about hip hop (history, sociology, cultural context, etc.) to the implementation of hip hop within the context of the pedagogical praxis. Runell-Hall (2011) suggests that hip hop pedagogy has evolved from early scholarly critiques on the history, practical and sociological influence on American culture
to a praxis which manifests itself in three distinct ways: hip hop as public pedagogy (Braszile, 2009; Hempsott, 2000), hip hop as the subject of study (Hill, 2009), and hip hop as pedagogy to teach other subject areas (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

II. Public Pedagogy Through the Lens of Hip Hop Culture

In July of 1990, the hip hop super group Boogie Down Productions (BDP), under the leadership of the enigmatic Kris “KRS-ONE” Parker, released the album *Edutainment* (1990). The album, an intentional mix of afro-centric lessons and socio-political commentaries on the state of the poor and people of color in America, is couched with 6 skits that BDP called *Exhibits*. The album contains *Exhibits A-F*, 6 quazi-lessons that were intended to be utilized as tools of empowerment by the listeners. This example and many other similar examples of albums during the late 1980s and early 1990s stand as engaging benchmarks as to the power of hip hop to increase awareness through the culture. It stands to reason that the earliest forms of public pedagogy through hip hop came from the early albums by “conscious” hip hop artists.

A decade later, KRS ONE on his album *Sneak Attack* (2001), in his song entitled *Why*, maintains public pedagogical teaching by not only using his music to do what he has done for so many albums and years which is to teach listeners, but also to critique the actual institutions of learning. In the song *Why*, KRS ONE begins the song by addressing a classroom of children as if he were an elementary school teacher. He begins by saying “Class is in Session.” After a pause and settling by the students he asks the class the question “What is democracy?” One student abruptly answers, “Yo, it’s the rule of the people.” Another responds, “the self-rule.” And a third belts out: “It’s what the people want!” In this intro to the song, KRS ONE formally places
himself in the actual role of the teacher to convey the message that there is little difference, if any, between himself as a rapper with a message and a teacher who stands in front of the classroom.

In his next breath KRS ONE begins to rap. In his first few words spoken in his role as a rapper in the song, he lands a critical blow to the current educational system as he questions the structure of schools across the country. KRS ONE raps:

WHY, are all the schools they fallin apart  
and WHY, the youth not takin no musical art  
and WHY, the professionals really don't know where to start  
No, one, really, cares, about  
WHY

These same critical questions are the basis for the creation of public pedagogy, which is the belief “that historical contingency, context, and social transformation are the core elements of creating a language of critique that is self-critical as it is socially responsible” (Giroux, 1997, p. 56). Public Pedagogy, according to Giroux (2003), is a critical element that encompasses a definition and simultaneously is defined by the problems posed by the context in which it attempts to address. Giroux points out two distinct aspects of Public Pedagogy: 1) It provides an important theoretical premise for overcoming a number of debilitating pessimisms and 2) It embodies a view of radical pedagogical theory premised on a notion that educators must be able to think and act against the grain.

Similar to KRS ONE’s approach to self-empowerment for his listeners within the culture of hip hop, Giroux (2003) posits that pedagogical principles should be critically engaged to
encourage students to learn how to govern themselves rather than be govern to exercise the
fundamental institution of democracy. In other words, Public Pedagogy should challenge
students to be active and critical citizens. Giroux goes on to state that the current trend in
American society is that privatization and commercialization within schools have begun the
process of co-opting the educational process and the teaching force is being downsized at
increasing rates; it is important to equip teachers and students alike. This means that a viable
theory of pedagogy imbued with a concern for curricula and classroom practice, which
aluminates social and institutional constraints that challenge the free-thinking and teaching
process. He goes on to say that in opposition to corporatization of schools, it is imperative that
progressive educators see public and higher education as tools in which to tell the story of
democracy and civic engagement in our nation. In addition, according the Giroux, labor
organizers, academics, and cultural workers should join together and oppose the
transformation of public schools and institutions of higher education into corporatized spheres
of commercialized learning. Giroux (2003) goes on to suggest that the main impetus of a public
pedagogy is to connect the educational process with those who are to be educated.

III. Hip Hop as the Subject of Study

Emory Petchauer, a hip hop scholar and professor at Northwestern University, whose
focus of study is on hip hop based education in Higher Education, has encapsulated hip hop’s
utility as an educational platform in the article *Framing and Reviewing Hip-Hop Educational
Research*. Petchauer (2009) displays the relevance of hip hop on the field of education and
draws deep connections between its ability to enhance the hip hop becoming relevant to the
field of education because of its implications for understanding language, learning, identity, curriculum, and other areas. Through his work, Petchauer offers historical context and cohesion for the rapidly increasing and expansive body of hip hop scholarship by framing it according to three exploratory categories and briefly discussing the strengths and weaknesses for the field of education. The article then critically reviews three major strands of designated literature across these groupings that are relevant to educational research. Lastly, the article outlines new directions for future research and conforming theoretical outlooks and strategic approaches (Petchauer, 2009).

The significance of this study couches hip hop pedagogy and hip hop based education into classifications that bridge the gaps between three discursive areas of scholarship: 1) Hip Hop Based Education 2) Meanings and Identities and 3) Aesthetic Forms of Hip Hop. These categories are grounded in three additional strands that take account of the utilization of relevant literature in an effort to ascertain information for educators who are less familiar with hip hop in education and for researchers in hip hop education to advance their research agendas. The strands are: Historical and Textual, Social Commentary and Grounded Studies, and each strand represents the basis for how hip hop education is used in the classroom. To create a coherent review of the literature, it is important to note that all the articles reviewed do not come from the educational field, but for the purpose of pushing educational knowledge on hip hop, all articles and related writings will be assessed under the umbrella of hip hop education.
According to Petchauer (2009), the scope and usage of hip hop in multi-disciplined areas of studies ranges a wide gamut, including but not limited to the following fields: philosophy (e.g., Darby & Shelby, 2005), sociology (e.g., Rose, 1994), psychology and counseling (e.g., Brown, 2006), communications (Dimitriadis, 2001), higher education (e.g., Petchauer, 2007), Black Studies (e.g., Smiterman, 1997), cultural studies (e.g., McLaren, 1997), women’s studies (e.g., Pough, 2004), spirituality (e.g., Morrell, 2004), curriculum studies (Ibrahim, 2004), sociolinguistics (e.g., Alim, 2004) and others. All of these fields of discursive bodies of literature or interdisciplinary fields draw upon one another and can be contextualized into three distinctive categories. For the purpose of labeling and classification, Petchauer has parsed all these multi-disciplinary fields into three heuristic categories: historical and textual, social commentary and grounded studies.

The origins of hip hop literature begin with the germinal work of Dr. Patricia Rose. The book *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994) lay the foundation for the elaboration of bridging the culture of hip hop with the history of black diasporic expression and people. Her work also positioned hip hop as a culture that will predictively grow and permeate facets of adolescent life globally. Since the publishing of this book, scholars who situation their work with in a historical and Afrocentric realm have taken the mantel and have pushed the boundary of knowledge expounding on the connections between hip hop and its origins. For example, Smitherman (1997) associated certain communicative practices steeped in African American culture with the culture of hip hop. Practices such as signifying and narrativizing are bridged with many foundational customs within hip hop culture. Another example of similarities within hip hop practice and African
based customs is published by Thompson (1996), who traced the origins of breakdancing to celebratory and ceremonial dance of the people of the Congo. These examples ground the historical context of literature within the interdisciplinary aesthetic of hip hop education.

In tandem with *historically contextual literature*, *Social Commentary* is another foundational grounding that is traced back to cultural studies. *Social Commentary* informs students of the world around them, by challenging messages crafted by overarching social structures. The ability to parse out meanings in events and societal trends equips students with tools to assess that which they are imbued. This process of learning is frequently considered the grounding for cultural studies. Often considered the forerunner of cultural studies, Henry Giroux (1994) leverages the importance of cultural context to the discussion around assessing norms and practices as education within the classroom. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), another proponent on contextual learning through culture, is considered one of the foremost voices on the implementation of culture in the realm of education. Ladson-Billings posits that “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 17), forms the basis of what she calls culturally responsive pedagogy. Both Giroux and Ladson-Billings would conjecture that social commentary within the context of the classroom essentially permits teachers to create a bridge between students’ home and school lives, while still meeting the curricular expectations and requirements.

Ladson-Billing’s (1992) assessment of the need for a culturally responsive pedagogy lay the foundation for the historically contextual literature by framing the pedagogy similar to the
framing of the literature strand. Dr. Ladson-Billings, after observing a small cohort of successful
teachers in a predominantly black, low socio-economic school setting, began to assess the
teachers in relation to their interaction with their students. What she discovered is that all of
the teachers shared pride in and obligation to their profession and had a grounded credence
that all children could learn and be successful. Students must experience academic success.
Furthermore, the teachers continued relationships with their students that were “fluid and
equitable” and often attended community events in order to demonstrate support for their
students. These teachers also believed in creating bonds with students and developing a
“community of learners,” which means that all students worked collaboratively to become
responsible for each other’s learning. Ladson-Billings maintains that in order for teachers to use
culturally relevant pedagogy successfully, they must also show respect for students and
“understand the need for the students to operate in the dual worlds of their home community
and the white community” (Ladson-Billings, 2005, pp. 162-163). Ladson-Billings posits that
there must be three components of culturally relevant pedagogy, which can also be considered
the basis of historical and textual literary practices: 1) Students must experience academic
success; 2) Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and 3) Students must
develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current
social order.

The last categorical strand outlined by Petchauer (2009) is Grounded Studies. Grounded
Studies separates from the voice, perspective and agenda of commentators and researchers.
Grounded Studies focus on the interpretations of hip hop and the people who make it. The
encounters and practices of those within the engine of hip hop cultural production are studied
to extrapolate meanings beyond hip hop texts that fulfill examiner’s agendas. *Grounded Studies* attentions the factors that precipitate hip hop development amongst students in a local framework. Clay (2003) suggests that performance, knowledge and identity function as a pedagogy of cultural capital for blacks and Latinos in particular. Petchauer goes on to separate the function of the three strands by saying:

“Grounded studies fill the void created by historical and textual approaches because they are derived from local participants and creators of hip hop rather than from products or texts. They focus on processes more than products, often through research designs (e.g., ethnography, portraiture, grounded theory) despite similar theoretical orientations of textual approaches.” (pp. 951-952)

The research conducted on Hip Hop Congress and the Urban Teachers Network would align with all three strands of multi-disciplinary fields of studies; however, the study would most closely find itself in the area of grounded studies.

Petchauer (2009) goes on to outline three scholarly strands of work relevant to education: “(a) hip-hop-based education, studies that use hip hop especially rap songs and lyrics as curricular and pedagogical resources; (b) hip-hop, meaning(s), and identities-studies that focus on how students mobilize these texts and how they intersect with identities; and (c) hip-hop aesthetic forms-studies that conceptualize the ways of doing or habits of mind produced by hip-hop practices” (p. 952). One of the first and longest enduring trends within hip hop and classroom learning is the utilization of rap lyrics and messaging within the music form of hip hop culture. This form of hip hop based education deconstructs its analysis within a wide breadth of educational subjects such as critical and academic literacies and citizenship. Beyond
the purpose of academic and critical literacies and citizenship, the subject matter of hip hop based education inform the basis of critical pedagogies and culturally responsive pedagogies. Both approaches center the curricula on educational process on culture and student-centered realities which bolster student learning in meaningful ways.

*Hip Hop Based Education* (HHBE) operates primarily on the principle that students construct and engross in literary practices that inform the ways in which they “behave, interact, value, think, believe, speak, and often read and write” (Gee, 1996, p. viii). HHBE, in addition to fostering literacy skills, has been a catalyst in developing a critical consciousness in particularly black and Latino students through the tool of assessment and evaluation of that which they hold dear... hip hop. Another area of scholarship is the exploration of meanings and identities. This research displays how hip hop culture play out in the everyday lives of students. What messages impact youth the most and why? What mechanisms facilitate and replicate the production of culture? Scholars and researchers alike utilize this body of scholarship and analyze how adolescent groups who operate within the loosely configured confines of hip hop identity leverage their distinctiveness as cultural and social capital. The ebb and flow of morality issues in society from an adolescent contemporary perspective are often debated on the perspective of meanings and identities.

The study of hip hop aesthetic forms often is used to examine hip hop practice in relation to the behavior and customs of the body and mind of adolescents. This scholarship relies on the core elements of hip hop culture couched in the wide range of activities associated and derived from the core elements. Simply stated, hip hop aesthetic forms apprises how
learning, practice, community, assessment, and other processes culminate with in hip hop to
develop and enhance pedagogy and curriculum.

IV. Origins of Critical Pedagogy

The origins of Critical Pedagogy can be traced back to the theorists of the Frankfort
University, which was founded in 1923 in Frankfort, Germany (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008).
Prior to and around the time of the founding of the school, other critical thinkers such as W.E.B.
Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Ida B. Wells and others engaged in liberatory philosophy in their
writing. However they did not label their philosophy as “critical” so often times they are not
credited with laying the foreground for critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). The
“Frankfort School” as it was called brought together some of the most influential minds of post-
modern philosophy to critique Western Civilization and its ideologies, psychoanalyze oppressive
structures, and assess mass culture and capitalism all under girded by the philosophies of
Marxism.

The Frankfort School was founded during several dynamic social shifts that fueled the
social research of the University. The shift from Soviet Marxism to Stallinism, the inability of
Marxism to influence the working of the west and the worsening conditions of the oppressed
and their collective passivity to the status quo, all inspired the work of the luminaries of the
Frankfort School. The school espoused the belief that understanding of one’s self would lead to
psychoanalysis and that would offer models for emancipation. In addition, this philosophy
offered the hope that by becoming aware of one’s hidden potential, one can be empowered
and overcome oppressive structure (Scheuerman, 2008). This was the guiding principle of Paulo Freire’s work.

Freire believed that education that not only educates in the classic sense in which it was intended, but also develops the critical consciousness and enables the learner to make connections between their individual problems and solutions through collective experiences, optimizing the educational process. He also recognized praxis as the first step to liberation through an on-going process of self-reflection and strengthening of oneself. Runell-Hall (2011) sums up the Freirean process as:

“Coming to consciousness through praxis which involves engaging in the process of learning theory, application of theory, evaluating the process of applying it to a situation, reflecting on the results, and eventually taking that information to create “new” theory. Social transformation then becomes the product of praxis at the collective level.” (p.96)

His assessment of a pedagogy, which would empower the marginalized, is spelled out in his groundbreaking work entitled Pedagogy of the Oppressed, originally released in Portuguese in 1968. Many of his concepts and guiding philosophies were channeled by the work created at the Frankfort School.

V. Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed

In the book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire lays out four major concepts, which he elaborates on throughout the book, all resulting in the process of empowering through liberatory education. The first section and chapter of the book deals with the justification for a pedagogy of the oppressed, the dichotomy of oppressors and oppressed - and how to move
beyond it and the concrete reality of oppression and the oppressed. Freire, in the first few pages, lays out four major concepts for the book: the justification for a pedagogy of the oppressed, which delineates the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed; the banking concept in education and its hazards to the learning process; the essence of education as a practice of freedom for the oppressed; and anti-dialogic and dialogic theorems and their dialectic positioning as instruments of oppression or instruments of liberation. This book, since its publication, has been a rallying cry for all who believe that education should be inclusive and empowering, free of class, ethnic and gender bias and most of all, impactful in changing lives for a better world tomorrow.

Freire’s first thought is to put forth pedagogy of the oppressed not for the oppressed. This distinction is critical in the belief that an individual should not view reality through the oppressive lens of one’s current circumstance. Instead, the marginalized should build reality from common everyday experiences of life, cultivating individual growth through learned experiences. The utility of daily life allows one to reflect critically on the world in which one lives, parsing out that which is useful and empowering from that which is not. Within this process of external and internal analysis, the individual or group create words and tactics, permitting them to cast aside conformity for reformation in their lives and world. Freire also implores students to think critically and reflect. He believes that if students spend time critiquing themselves and their surroundings that this will lead to constructive realities in which they envision a better life and existence for themselves and others like them.
However dangerous and hazardous, the banking method of education may be to students and society as a whole as if there is no alternative to it. Creative, revolutionary thinkers who challenge and question their realities must rely on alternative educating, especially on the elementary, middle, and high school levels. In the context of Rhetoric and Composition courses for first year English classrooms, Freire’s ideology has no place.

Oftentimes teachers are given syllabus that they must teach to in classrooms filled with far too many students to adequately encourage any type of “free writing” or “thinking.” In these situations, the most they can be done on by the teacher is to try to encourage unique writing prompts and teaching methods to help students learn and begin to image producing work with some individuality.

In reading Paulo Freire’s Chapter Two of his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire discusses a teaching practice known as *The Banking Method* in which teachers essentially provide the students with information to store and later regurgitate back to them. Freire explains how this method is hazardous to the student by saying:

“The banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that work. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited on them.” (Ch. 2)

Freire is clarifying that the teacher, being in a position of power, has the ability to instruct the students in a manner that reaches significantly farther than the walls of the classroom. He believes that *The Banking Method* of education gives and maintains power
structures creating an Oppressor/Oppressed dichotomy within not only education, but also society as a whole. He cites this as being the major deficit in *The Banking Method*:

“Indeed the interests of the oppressors lie in the ‘changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppressors which oppresses them,’ (1) for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunctions with paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of ‘welfare recipients.’ They are treated as individual cases, a marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a ‘good, organized and just’ society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society which must therefore adjust their ‘incompetent and lazy’ folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be ‘integrated,’ ‘incorporated,’ into the healthy society that has been ‘forsaken.’” (Ch. 2)

With that being said, while examining current standards and methods of education beginning from grade school throughout the first four years of college, one cannot help but to wonder, aren’t all students subject to this type of education, especially in public and lower standard education situations? Students are not encouraged to “think outside of the box” nor are they encouraged to think creatively or abstractly. This type of thinking could possibly encourage free thinkers and those who wish to challenge the status quo.

However, one cannot argue that the system is set up this way as a means of measuring and ensuring a “standard” of quality education. Teachers on all levels are encouraged to teach a standardized curriculum that students will be tested on. The students’ test results determine funding for the schools and teachers so teachers have very little freedom or opportunity to deviate from their requirements. Ultimately, where does this leave the educational system? Is Freire’s theory too idealistic? Some may argue that it is and that these education systems are set up not to encourage a critical consciousness.
When considering how only certain percentages of students will graduate from high school and then enter and graduate from a two or four year college program, it can be argued that creating a society of self-thinking, revolutionary individuals is not encouraged. Most societies, especially a capitalistic society such as the one American’s live under in the United States, is created to allow certain populations to “succeed.” Although attaining an education is mandatory, the quality of education is definitely not the same across the board. This creates a dichotomy in which some students will succeed and some simply will not. This is not by accident, it is by design. A capitalistic society would crumble and fall apart because it simply would not work if everyone entered the world of education on the same footing. Students are set up from the beginning to essentially fail. They will not question their role in society because they are not taught or encouraged to do so. Many will simply accept their roles and play their parts.

Although Freire is arguing against this very type of thinking and educating, little can be done to change this because the dominant oppressors continue to create the standards in which society must live by. Freire goes on to explain:

“Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent often not perceived by educators of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression. This accusation is not made in the naïve hope that the dominant elites will thereby simply abandon the practice. Its objective is to call the attention of true humanists to the fact that they cannot use banking educational methods in the pursuit of liberation, for they would only negate that very pursuit. Nor may a revolutionary society inherit these methods from an oppressor society. The revolutionary society which practices banking education is either misguided of mistrusting of people. In either event, it is threatened by the specter of reaction.” (Ch. 2)
A. What is Hip Hop Activism?

The term hip hop activism is one of those phrases that is received with great trepidation and feelings of distrust for many reasons. Recently, I sat on a panel at the University of Michigan and discussed the topic of the viability of the term “Hip Hop Activism.” On the panel with me were several local and national activists and two national recording artists. Early in the discussion it was apparent that the term did not resonate positively with the community organizers or the artists who from the on-slot of the program displayed their commitment to service in the community. One of the recurring issues is centered on the commercial labeling of the phrase and how there is a measure of cooptation associated with allowing the term in the work. One activist suggested that there has been and always will be activism, but using the term hip hop activism undermines the true essence of community organizing. She went on to say that community organizing does not ascribe to any particular genre and that it is divisive to suggest otherwise.

This same sentiment is echoed in a blog (J-Smooth995, 2003) entitled “What is Hip-Hop Activism?” In the blog it declares that the term is a “political and media head game to create new slang” (p.1), wherefore the media and others control the conversation around how community activism in hip hop culture is presented and utilized. The blog goes on to suggest that the propaganda guides the public opinion through its public perception of the subject. The example given is America’s public opinion of Manuel Noriega. The example suggests that
Noriega was once an ally and was spoken of favorably in the media until he became an enemy of the United States, at which time he became known as “Noriega the Panamanian Strong Man.” Other examples given were the use of the terms “Axis of Evil” and “Weapons of Mass Destruction.” These examples imply that allowing the media to control public perception like in the case of Manuel Noriega, could cause hip hop community building to suffer the same ominous spin set forth by a fickle and self-serving media.

Another issue that the blog (J-Smooth 995, 2003) deduces is that the term “Hip Hop Activism” is a nebulous concept that evokes more questions about the functionality and viability of the phrase than it answers. The questions asked by J-Smooth are as follows: Does this describe any actions carried out by the hip hop generation (another highly contested phrase)? Does it mean activities led by actual hip hop artists or industry figures? Are there certain tactics that must be employed for and activity to qualify as hip hop activism, just as hip hop fashion requires wearing certain clothes, and hip hop music requires certain elements? These are very appropriate questions – questions that galvanize the proponents of the utility of the phrase. Many who disavow the effectiveness of this catch phrase to categorically sum up the community work conducted by activists born in the post-civil rights era render the phrase schismatic.

The phrase is credited to hip hop journalist, self-proclaimed media assassin and long-time affiliate with Public Enemy, Harry Allen. He coined the phrase when acting as a mediator during the tension between the media and Public Enemy minister of information Professor Griff, after alleged anti-Semitic remarks made by the group’s founder. He is credited with the
initial usage of the name, but many activists have adopted the label to situate their community work with the “hip hop generation.” The term “hip hop generation” is another term that is highly contested in terms of its ability or inability to surmise this generation’s identity. The term hip hop activism was coined by one of hip hop’s early pioneers and scholar activist, Harry Allen, in the mid 1980’s. Allen gave a name to the ongoing efforts of community leaders who identified with hip hop culture and utilized its political edge for social justice. Allen also believed that hip hop activism was a way to critique the rapidly evolving culture and unify the expansive culture for change (Chang, 2003).

There have been two scholars (or if I might inject another contentious term, “Hip Hop Scholars”) in particular who have attempted to encapsulate the generations associated with the hip hop cultural phenomenon. In Bakari Kitwana’s (2002) book *Hip Hop Generation*, he frames the “hip hop generation” as African Americans born between the years 1965 and 1984. These years are bracketed by the passage of civil rights legislation and the assignation of Malcolm X on one end and height of the Reagan era, which came to define facets of hip hop culture. Jeff Chang (2005) challenges Kitwana’s narrowly defined grouping of adolescents imbued with creating, fostering and promoting hip hop culture. He believes that Kitwana’s first assertion that hip hop in its germinal state in the South Bronx was a multicultural phenomenon, including contributions in particular by Puerto Rican B-boys and graffiti artists. Secondly, Chang disputes the notion that the year of inclusion begins in 1965. He asks the question: “How would one accept a definition of a hip hop generation which excluded the culture’s pioneers like Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaata for being born too early” (p. 2). Chang goes on to suggest that it is merely impossible to put a date on the generation. Instead, he offers a plausible answer by advocating
that if one believes himself or herself to be part of the generation accepting the contributions of the founders (Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaata, etc.), then he or she is part of the hip hop generation.

Both Kitwana and Chang agree on the progressive direction of movements in hip hop activism. In an monograph written by Chang (2003) entitled *What is Activism*, Chang suggests that activists who were born after and have benefited from the civil rights movement which helped shape hip hop, view a world radically different from their parents. He goes on to suggest that because of these factors that adolescents and those who are motivated to make a change in the world, reflect many of their values and sensibilities based on hip hop culture. Issues centered on race, power and reality are critically aligned with resistance perspectives of hip hop. Chang (2003) adds that the hip hop generation is faced with issues that are multifaceted in nature and require progressive thoughts and actions:

“In this post-civil rights era, globalization and demographic change have transformed traditional social relations, while national politics appears as less viable vehicle for change than ever. The hip hop generation is forced to engage a wide variety of struggle simultaneously – militarization, monopolization, incarceration, AIDS, environmental justice, education, jobs, and more.” (p. 4)

Bakari Kitwana (2008), in a lecture given at the 2008 Hip Hop Congress National Convention on July 25th in Biloxi, Mississippi, concurs with the challenges of the hip hop generation presented by Chang, by saying that globalization, gentrification and neo-liberalism are some of the most pressing issues opposing hip hop activists currently. Chang (2003) lists three trends that have shaped the politics of the hip hop generation: neo-conservatism, cultural
conservatism’s cultural war which leads to open political criticism by the left and right, and the war on youth (p.5).

Both also agree on the changes the past four decades have presented to the hip hop generation: activism in the 1970s, according to Kitwana (2008), was encapsulated by actions taken against the generation (police brutality, deindustrialization, and a globalizing economy). Kitwana suggests that in the 1980s, there was a divide between those who identified themselves as just activists and those who self-identified as hip hop activists around issues such as AIDS awareness, apartheid divestment and legislation further disenfranchising youth in urban communities. In the early days of hip hop activism, from a mainstream perspective, the movement was closely associated with anti-Apartheid and South African divestment movements. Shortly after hip hop artists became mainstream commodities, the hip hop activist movement, from a pop cultural stand point, became synonymous with the Stop the Violence Movement, due in large part to the song “Self Destruction” which featured a plethora of hip hop’s most powerful voices pleading for an end to senseless murders in the inner city as a result of the crack epidemic of the mid to late 1980s. The Stop the Violence Movement was also a stern condemnation of mainstream media race-and-youth-baiting so prevalent in the 1980s (Chang, 2003).

The 1990s is divided into early decade activism as hip hop organizers centered efforts on grassroots strategies; two mentioned by Kitwana were The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in Oakland and Cop Watch originating in Berkley. The developments in hip hop activism in California in the early 90s are the predecessors of late 70s activism, which Kitwana (2008) says
was the period of national organizing and multilateral empowerment. Chang (2003) also suggests that there is nothing coincidental about the insurgence of grassroots organizing utilizing hip hop in the Bay Area. He states: “The Bay Area has become a fertile ground for hip hop activism, boasting perhaps the most diverse and developed hip hop activist infrastructure in the country” (p. 6). Out of this region and period of time, Hip Hop Congress finds inception. The organization Hip Hop Congress, by sheer happenstance at its core, address two critical areas of foci when effectively implementing a strategy of resistance and empowerment: 1) Artist responsibility in terms of content and context and 2) Grassroots efforts that connect local activism with national support. Both are equivocally important and vitally critical, strategically employing activism and leadership from a hip hop perspective (Rose, 2008; Bynoe, 2004).

According to Chang in an article entitled “Constant Elevation: The Rise of Bay Area Hip Hop Activism,” the hip hop generation was the first to emerge after the civil rights and black power movements (Chang, 2003). Imbued with societal gains, the civil rights movement became the fertile ground needed for the expansion and cultivation needed to become a multi-billion dollar commodity. In the midst of commercial success and viability, many within the ranks of hip hop have critically analyzed the trends that have played a profound role in the shaping of the culture, and invariably how the culture has helped shape societal trends.

Another similarly positioned argument on the origins of hip hop activism is offered by Bakari Kitwana, author of “The Hip Hop Generation: The Crisis in African American Culture.” Kitwana (2003) contends that the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and the culture wars of the 1980 Reaganomics Era should be credited with fueling and re-fueling the life of hip hop
activism within the culture. He goes on to say that the “old guard” – those that were instrumental in the black power movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s have unintentionally, but nonetheless, forgotten about the issues of those born after their era. Very few blacks seem to recognize the impact that the generational gap plays in terms of intergenerational relations, forcing many youth to take up their own fight against social injustice (Bowman, 2004).

One of the first guides for organizing and soliciting funds for grassroots organizing came from a then twenty year-old activist from San Francisco’s Youth Commission. Jesse Alejandro Cottell wrote an article entitled “Mobilizing the Hip-Hop Generation.” In the article Cottrell (2003) begins by proclaiming that “hip hop is being reclaimed from the clutches of corporations by youth activists furthering movements of social change.” The article admonishes the hip hop industry for its careless banter of sexism, materialism and self-decadence. In the same article, Davey D., one of the earliest hip hop activists, is quoted saying: “One of the first steps in reclaiming hip hop from corporations is to introduce the masses to politicized hip hop.” He goes on to say: “They stole it from us, repackaged it, and are selling it back to us as something they created” (Cottell, 2003, p. 2).

Cottell (2003) gives four doable steps to funding community projects. The first step discusses creating a budget. No funding source will even consider funding a project with no outlined plans for how the money will be utilized, the more detailed the better. The second plan of action is to create a five year fiscal plan. Foundations will require a multi-year fiscal plan, considering the fact that they will only fund for a limited number of years. Additionally,
foundations will want to be assured that they are not funding an operation that will potentially become inoperative once their funding has ended. A five year fiscal plan in essence shows self-sustainability. The third course of action that should be taken is to create a mission statement. The mission statement should only be a few sentences detailing the grounding philosophy of the organization. According to the article, the mission statement is the heart and soul of the grant proposal, as it declares to the potential funding source what the organization is and what it will do. Lastly, a burgeoning organization should solicit a fiscal sponsorship. A fiscal sponsorship is a non-profit 501(c)(3) status organization that is established and is willing to help oversee the daily money matters of the organization. After creating a functional non-profit, the organization has to develop a viable political constituency.

Yvonne Bynoe (2004), the author of a provocative book on hip hop activism entitled “Stand and Deliver: Political Activism, Leadership and Hip Hop Culture,” gives a thought-provoking challenge to hip hop organizations to create a course of action to control the images, messages and the course of the ubiquitous culture known as hip hop. She spells out in detail five tips for social change agents to consider when using hip hop to make a difference. Bynoe contends that social change agents must realize that content is not neutral, which means that everything produced sends a message. Understanding this fact will allow one to question the motivation for the production of certain material. The second point made by Bynoe is that the culture must focus more on the history in order not to stray too far from its intended purpose. Beyond understanding hip hop culture’s origin, it is even more important to understand and appreciate black history. Leadership development is the third point stressed in the article.
Leadership must have a clear-cut steadfast focus that demystifies the very concept of leadership. Leadership must become a shared obligation that empowers all to engage in various productive ways. The fourth tip is to fight images with images. The fifth is to think of civic engagement beyond voter registration. Oftentimes the extent of many groups’ community engagement is too frequently centered on voter drives and extended politics. The article encourages young people to move beyond political rhetoric and symbolic activism towards substantive political action.

In the book “Stand and Deliver: Political Activism, Leadership and Hip Hop Culture,” Bynoe (2004) suggests that there are two types of leadership and they are: 1) charismatic leadership and 2) citizen leadership. Charismatic leadership is associated with three elements which facilitate collective movement: envisioning, energizing and enabling. A charismatic leader envisions a direction or goal, subsequently energizing the collective with that vision and lastly, empathetically lending support in times of hardship during implementation. Bynoe goes on to suggest that this form of leadership is extremely limited in its ability to influence clear and sustainable change. She suggests that charismatic leadership rarely invests substantive time or energy to parse out vision and execution of that vision. The other component of activism is citizen leadership, which Bynoe (2004) says is “more realistic and productive and positions citizens to become the leaders that they need and desire (p. 11).”

According to Harold Cruz (1968), the formerly mentioned charismatic leadership style has its roots in black America during the vacuous post civil rights era, when many social programs were implemented leaving a void in communal leadership and fostering individual
opportunism leading to charismatic leadership. In hip hop culture, the charismatic leader can translate to the hip hop artist. The hip hop artist often discloses his or her vision through his or her music, often inspiring and energizing many to action, but often finds it hard to maintain the call for mobilization without a concerted and strategic plan that withstands the initial emotionalism of the artist’s vision. The citizen leader bolsters the collective effort of empowerment and adds substance to the theoretically imbued ideology of resistance and empowerment broadcasted through the music. Both the citizen leadership and charismatic leadership are fundamental aspects of Hip Hop Congress’ mission to provide the hip hop generation with the tools, resources and opportunities to make social, economic and political change.

The connective relationship between the charismatic leadership and the citizen leadership culminates in a simultaneous idea of empowerment through hip hop culture that seems more scripted than realistic. Fueled by the belief that the individual contributor to the culture is essential in addressing needs within the aesthetic of hip hop, connected by the use of the same name, two different groups created auxiliaries that did just that. On the campus of the University of Southern California, two upper middle class, politically-conscious white students, after taking a class on activism, decided to create a conduit in which like-minded activist could network, support and exchange ideas via the internet; they called their site *Hip Hop Congress*. Simultaneously, two black hip hop artists from the inner city of San Jose, California, formed an artist development group to train rappers to be cognizant of their message and lyrical content. This endeavor, too, was called *Hip Hop Congress*. 
B. History of Hip Hop Congress

I. The Founding of Hip Hop Congress

The organization has emerged from very fortuitous beginnings - two antipodal sets of young men from vastly different backgrounds, one pair creating an artist development organization as a counter-movement to the rapidly growing messages of degradation in hip hop culture and the other creating a website as a means of connecting pockets of social activists from around the country. During this period in Hip Hop Congress history, the organization functioned as an artist development incubator, throwing shows around the San Palo Alto-San Jose and Bay Area. In addition to the artist showcases, the organization began to cut its political teeth by organizing Anti-Racial Profiling and Police Brutality protests in the Oakland area. Upon hearing of each other’s existence using the same name, all four young men decided to meet to see if they could work together. The serendipitous meeting of both groups ignited a movement that continues to grow as the culture expands for both the betterment of hip hop.

When meeting members of Hip Hop Congress for the first time, one may initially notice several characteristics about the group that are instantly recognizable. Many of the distinctive attributes serve as a notice to the unique composition of the group, as well as evoking inquiry as to the assemblage of such a group. The motley cohort of activists from nearly every conceivable ethnicity, socio-economic, and walk of life stands as a visual measure to the power of alliance through common ground. In addition to the commonality of activism, the youthfulness of the group is another distinctive classification upon closer examination. The
aforementioned characteristic evokes adumbrations of the energy and selfless determination of the civil rights movement.

One of the more interesting aspects of the organizational structure of Hip Hop Congress is that the group is in its infancy. Three of the four founders of the organization are still active and very involved with the daily operations. This dynamic ensures the replication of Hip Hop Congress’ mission while cultivating the next generation of organizational leadership to the rudimentary aspects that the group is founded upon. Each of the founders hold leadership positions on the executive board of the organization and have ironically had begun grooming what they call the “second wave” of leadership of the organization, all of which are also in leadership.

The “second wave” of leadership occurred when one of the founders graduated from a large university in Southern California and went to Graduate School in the Midwest. Upon enrolling at a large Midwestern university, he quickly met like-minded students who loved hip hop culture and desired to merge social activism with hip hop; this was the initial expansion past the Rockies. Since this expansion, the organization has seen a proliferation in the number of chapters in the Midwest; this growth led to subsequent yet modest expansion into the eastern seaboard regions, namely Baltimore and in the Deep South, particularly Mississippi.

Most cities that have active chapters usually have a city chapter and a college chapter, both of which work closely to achieve agreed-upon objectives for the community. Oftentimes universities or colleges that are located within rural environments may not have the partnership of a city chapter, due in part to the lack of interest in hip hop culture in the non-
collegiate community. It is important to note that Hip Hop Congress’ life blood has been and continues to be the college student. The hip hop movement’s dependence on collegiate masses parallels the civil rights movement in that the youth fuel the sustainability and direction of the modern grass roots movement (Morrell, 2002).

The group whose unofficial motto is “you don’t join us, we join you” understands the importance of connecting local activism with national networking and agenda, defying the claim by Bynoe (2004) who exclaims that hip hop activism has no national agenda nor ability to execute one. There have been efforts by the group to connect various regions with differing issues that the activists deal with. The initial goal was to come up with the fundamental tenants and guiding principles that the organization will stand for (See Appendix A). According to the website, this is the core of Hip Hop Congress’ values and guiding principles in which the organization exists, operates and continues to develop:

“The Hip Hop Congress provides the Hip Hop Generation and the Post Hip Hop Generation with the tools, resources and opportunities to make social, economic and political change on a local, regional and national level. Hip Hop Congress is the product of a merger of artists and students, music and community. It achieves this mission in a variety of ways.” (http://www.hiphopcongress.com)

This statement situates the mission within a multigenerational paradigm and covers a wide constituency of those interested in various factions of hip hop culture and its ability to affect change. To attain the mission, the organization created three broad initiatives that have the capacity to unite activists, artists, educators and the hip hop generation under national initiatives which become vital in creating a collective identity. The three initiatives according to
the Hip Hop Congress website are: 1) Chapter Programs, 2) Artists Programs, and 3) Educational Initiatives. Each of these programs or initiatives is an outgrowth of the rudimentary programs conducted by the two sets of founders prior to merging and growing the organization. Each is crucial to fostering an identity and connecting chapters from around the nation and abroad. In addition, each initiative allows for the utilization of specific talents by each member of the organization, which totals over 30 chapters (see Appendix B).

“Hip Hop Congress’ Chapter Program develops chapters in communities, high schools and colleges. Hip Hop Congress has more than 30 chapters nationwide with more in development. Hip Hop Congress chapters engage in a range of activity promoting Hip Hop culture on their campus or in their community. They also collectively produce or sponsor roughly 200 events a year. Most chapters promote awareness festivals: a week of different events focusing on Hip Hop culture, as well as panels, speeches, emcee/bboy/DJ exhibition/battle, film screenings, etc.” (http://hiphopcongress.com)

II. Hip Hop Congress Chapters

The chapter program is the structural backbone of connective efforts to maintain continuity between abroad and America, executive board and chapters, regions, city chapters and collegiate chapters (see Appendix B). The chapter initiative is where foundational and programmatic ideas about hip hop culture, activism and subsequent initiatives such as local collaborations with other activist organizations are implemented. Additionally, from a programmatic perspective, the organization develops and maintains a national and international reputation as a progressive organization through its community relations and service; an issue in which the founders were concerned about as the organization began to grow. The chapter program has been, is and will continue to be the life blood of Hip Hop
Congress. If the chapter initiative is the blood, then the artist development has to be considered the arterial or venous system in which the blood courses and moves.

The artist program is aesthetically the reason for the organization’s activism. The artist program serves two primary functions: to address issues around artist responsibility to promote positive messages and imagery in hip hop music, and to serve as a network for artists to collaborate, develop artist agendas and generate revenue from shows, album sales and other artistic productions. The ability to sustain one’s artistry is important for many factors, a few being the capacity to control one’s music, message and image; support for one’s artistry without the assistance of a major label; and the capability to connect with “real” hip hop fans who will advocate for the artist network. In addition to the benefits of the artist collective, there is a regional board which disseminates and manages the artists, ensuring the viability of the artist program.

With the growth and proliferation of chapters across the country, the executive board began to worry about the direction of the individual chapters. The sentiment had been discussed about the concern that individual chapters may be more involved in throwing concerts and hip hop programs than actually engaging the community in role as activists. In an email sent by founder and second president of Hip Hop Congress, this issue was addressed amongst the executive board about the current political climate and Hip Hop Congress’ role within it:

“...the increased political nature of the moment (Gulf Coast, Educational Reform, War In Iraq, Housing) forces certain leadership within Hip Hop Congress to deal with the fact that not engaging the political forces of our time could quickly render us irrelevant,
while having to grapple with the reality that many in the organization are either 1) Just on some student club ish or 2) Just on some artist ish.” (S. Noble, 2007, p.7)

This correspondence challenged each chapter to reassess its community engagement and political proclivity amidst the growing issues facing marginalized groups and the hip hop generation. This concern from the leadership suggests that the organization’s primary goal is to make Hip Hop Congress a politically-engaged force in national affairs concerning hip hop culture and urban communities.

III. The Growth of Hip Hop Congress

This issue around the political nature of the organization, as well as many infrastructural questions, accompanied the growth of the organization. One of the most effective ways of addressing many of these challenges lay in the synergy and creative collectivity that was generated during the conference. “We also need to take into account the fact that the conference, is in large part, for the growth and development of Hip Hop Congress” (S. Noble, 2006, p.2). The conference becomes the focal point for connecting like-minded activists from around the country, enabling the general body to aid in individual struggles in communities throughout the nation. Another purpose that the conference serves in hindsight is to chronicle key events, which benchmark important trends within the direction and movement of the organization.

The first conference was held in San Jose, California in 2002. The organization was small with only four chapters at the time. The first conference was implemented by only two of the
founders of the organization; the others would collaborate during the planning of the second Hip Hop Congress Conference. A goal of ten chapters was set at the first conference. In addition to that goal, the chapters were tasked with implementing fifty programs and working with one hundred artists – five programs and ten artists a year per chapter. During the 2002 conference, the four chapters were situated in the south of California. The following year it spread north of the Bay Area. The chapters began as artist development groups and evolved into community organizations, first in San Jose, then extending into Oakland and the Peninsula north of the bay area.

The next year the conference was held in Los Angeles. During 2002-2003, Los Angeles had between five and seven chapters most consisting of college chapters, which became the prototype of the college chapter: establishing the binary city/college chapter model which has been replicated in the expansion into northern California and east into the Midwest. At the conference, the artist development agenda was addressed in terms of its compatibility with the larger hip hop community outside of Southern California region. The conference addressed the preeminent expansion north in California and west past the Mississippi river.

The next two conferences took place in the Midwest. 2004 conference was conducted in St. Louis, the new home of one of the founders who moved there to work for Teach for America. The creation of the Midwestern regional summit implemented by second wave leadership in two different Midwestern higher educational institutions proved to be significant in influencing the educational direction of the organization. 2005 conference took place in Chicago, one of the newest hot beds of Hip Hop Congress’ eastward expansion. Chicago, with
approximately four chapters at this time mainly consisting of artist collectives and university
chapters all utilizing the Zulu and Urban Arts in Action initiatives, helped usher in the education
initiative which is passed at 2005 conference. In addition to the passage of the education
initiative, the women’s initiative was initially conceived and created by three women who felt
that women’s issues were being overlooked in the male-dominated culture of hip hop. The first
president and founder stepped down and the second president who is also a founder was
 nominated and installed.

The next site for the 2006 Hip Hop Congress conference was chosen after an emotional
debate – Boulder, Colorado. Boulder was chosen primarily as a sentimental return back to the
west. Also, Boulder’s chapter (one of the oldest non-California chapters) was in need of
support, solidifying the location’s nomination. At the conference the newly installed president
laid out an aggressive strategy to address three primary areas of focus: 1) Expanding the
leadership base of the organization, 2) Expanding the expertise and profile of the organization
(and finding more leaders who can help facilitate the expansion), and 3) Consolidate the
communications and operations of existing programs and assess functioning structures of that
which is already in place. The leadership of Hip Hop Congress, along with the newly elected and
very intuitive president and founder, implemented two very important structural changes to
the ever-growing organization in need of structural evaluation and reconfiguration: the
Advisory Committee and the Regional Directorship (See Appendix D). Both the Advisory
Committee and the Regional Directorship played a profound role in the next few conferences
and years of organizational expatiation.
The Advisory Committee was adapted out of the concept of the governing body initially established as the “National Board” (See Appendix C & D). The National Board consisted of four full-time national volunteers, all of whom happened to be the founders of the organization. Within this leadership structure, there was little clarity and room within this format of adopting new leadership and so the organizational structure remained governed by the senior leadership who first conceptualized the organization. This format was both a blessing and a curse. The blessing was that the ideals espoused at the inception of the organization were imbued from a top down approach to the organizational body. The curse was that the organization left little room for new ideas and new direction. The forward-thinking founders acknowledged this challenge and at the 2006 national conference, they decided to relinquish and disseminate the power base of the organization in the form of an Advisory Board:

“Because the National Board was ‘at that time’ based on seniority, it was awkward to conceive of just finding new people to throw on there, and the developing complexity of the challenges that Hip Hop Congress was going to face as it expanded (an inevitability in many ways) would require a leadership that was capable of operating in multiple fields: the industry, education, event planning, non-profit work, political and social analysis, etc. We were going to find all of that in students and young rappers. This is when the advisory committee concept was presented.” (S. Noble, personal communication, September 23, 2006)

In the transition from a national board to an advisory board, three educators were brought in and they assisted with the conversion by suggesting specific roles that the advisory board should fulfill. The existing members of the former national board were very accommodating in welcoming new ideas and suggesting new concepts during the re-orientation phase, as the leadership negotiated a new direction for the organization.
The second organizational reconfiguration came through the reassessment of the concept of the regional director position. There has always been a regional director structure in the expansion of the organization. This concept was implemented during the second wave of leadership and the eastward expansion of the organization to the Midwest. The regional director’s position was analyzed and the appointed position was surmised to fulfill two functions: 1) manage regional growth and 2) grow the regional area through chapter development and alliances with similar activist organizations. Another point that is reiterated is that during the 2006 conference the political initiative and the women’s project were started, and the culmination of the regional director’s mission to develop chapters within the region and the two initiatives helped to decide the next two conference sites.

One site proposed for the 2007 national conference was Las Vegas. This conference site would normally be a near shoe in because of all the amenities and fun that sin city has to offer, but it was turned down and Athens, Ohio was nearly unanimously voted in as the place that would host the 2007 national conference. Besides the obvious inequalities that stood between the two cities, one city a vacation destination and the other an hour away from the nearest airport with a population of 22,134 according to a 2009 census, Athens posed great possibility to Hip Hop Congress:

“The presentation of the Women’s Project plays a role in swaying the decision about the conference, when Athens presents itself as a woman run organization with a partnering organization that is all female. We all swoon.” (S. Noble, personal communication, April 9, 2008)
The conference was well-attended in spite of the late budgetary restrictions imposed by the university who was to share in the financial responsibility of implementing the conference. Most who attended the conference had to fly into Columbus and take a shuttle to Athens, Ohio. But despite the unavoidable obstacles, many chapters from the West Coast, Sacramento in particular, showed up in large numbers.

On July 7th at the 2007 Athens conference, Hip Hop Congress participated in the Live Earth events that were scheduled in over 129 countries culminating in over 7000 events. Hip Hop Congress live streamed a showcase of its artists and participated in supporting government legislative reduction of carbon dioxide emissions by 2050, energy conservation, alternative energy sources and protection of world forests. At the conference, Hip Hop Congress members also signed a statement on Live Earth’s internet site pledging support in eliminating global warming. This collaboration began to solidify national alliances that became very important in forging partnerships with other politically engaged activist organizations:

“External and Internal pressure calls for Hip Hop Congress to shift (or to publicly reflect) more of its community activities in its image. In the meantime, we struggle to find a way to articulate simply what we do, with chapters, regions and national board members scattering the HHCness over a variety of different topics with a variety of different partners.” (S. Noble, personal communication, March 7, 2007)

During this period in Hip Hop Congress’ development, they merged their efforts with those of other organizations that changed the dynamics of their collective activism, propelling the organization in new directions.
Shortly after the Athens conference, one of the founders who also worked with a teaching institute as a co-director, attended a conference in Cleveland, Ohio. He met members of University of New York Hip Hop Education program called H2ED. This group wrote the “Hip Hop Education Guide Book Vol. 1” (2007) and wanted to work with Hip Hop Congress to put together a hip hop educational tour. The tour never happened, but the relationship formed proved to be vital in the development of an aggressive and effective hip hop education program for Hip Hop Congress. Two weeks after the conference in Cleveland, another key alliance was formed by the same founder who attended the National Hip Hop Political Convention and bonded with representatives of the Poor People’s Economic Rights Campaign (PPERC) and political organization *Unite Here*. From these relationships, Hip Hop Congress members began to build with PPERC ally *Community Against Hate*, an East Coast group, forging alliances on the eastern seaboard.

2008 conference took place in a region of the country that previously had not seen much expansion for the bourgeoning organization. The conference was strategically placed in the south, the Deep South. Biloxi, Mississippi became the recipient of the 2008 Hip Hop Congress Conference because of the Congress’ need to expose the south to the organization and to help support the small group of artists and activists who were anxious for the experience and the exposure. The conference was poorly attended partially because of the remote location and the exorbitant rise in airfare over the summer. Those in attendance were able to weigh in on the political direction of the organization. It was here that Hip Hop Congress heard from the hip hop activist and first female woman of color vice presidential nominee, Green Party Candidate Rosa Clemente.
Clemente traveled to Biloxi to spend time with Congress members and addressed the small assembly during the second day of the conference. Her speech addressed the vital nature of the 2008 electoral season. She said in her very candid speech that it was going to be important to look at each candidate and vote for the platform that best served the most indigent in society. She suggested that neither the Republican Party nor the Democratic Party can politically serve in the best interest of the powerless or the hip hop generation. Her answer to the lack of political attention given to the groups that Hip hop Congress serves is the party that was bold enough to nominate two women of color for president and vice president; one of whom has pledged her life to fighting injustice through hip hop culture. Her answer was to endorse the Green Party. She went on to give a historic portrayal of the party of activist Ralph Nader. After the speech, the general body went in recess and at the end of the day, they endorsed the Green Party. This was the first political endorsement given by Hip Hop Congress.

The next conference took place in Seattle, Washington in 2009. The conference was a reinvestment in supporting the west region. Actually, the region in which the conference took place is considered the northwest region. It was also important to host in a region that had never had a conference and the attention of the national general body of Hip Hop Congress. It has always been the wish of the national office to execute conferences in places that could benefit from the organization’s presence. In a memo sent out by the leadership of the organization addressing discourse around potential sites for conferences, this was discussed about the desired effect of the conference:

“"My vote goes to any place that can help Congress most effectively. Where we can help a surrounding community by the mere exposure of the community to Hip Hop Congress,"
inviting them to our workshops and group meetings, while still having time to devote energy to strengthening Congress as a core group. This should be our focus.” (S. Noble, 2007)

Organizing a conference in the Seattle, Washington area would fulfill this mission and reenergize the region. There was an incident that happened nearly nine months earlier at a community college in the Olympia, Washington area that prompted the organization to focus efforts in the region. The incident resulted in a physical altercation with local law enforcement after a concert co-sponsored by the local Olympia, Washington chapter of Hip Hop Congress, which resulted in several arrests and over $30,000 in damages. According to the account of the events stemming from the night of February 14, 2008, following a well-attended concert sponsored by Hip Hop Congress, 206 Zulu (a chapter of the Zulu Nation) and over 40 community and student organizations, a fight broke out between local police and party-goers. During the fracas a police car was overturned and damage to venues on campus resulted in a repair bill that ranged in the tens of thousands of dollars. The fault was inconclusive and the student body is left to pay for the damages. Hip Hop Congress was absolved of any fault, but felt compelled to address the situation through an individual investigation, a community forum hosted by the president and executive director and fundraising efforts. Hip Hop Congress, along with 206 Zulu, created a compilation album for the specific intent of turning over all revenue to the student activities department at the college, the institutional department that paid for the damages.

“In addition to the dialogue, Hip Hop Congress national and 206 Zulu, in partnership with student organizers at the Evergreen State College, have decided to start the first large-scale fundraising project to launch the process of restorative justice and proactive
restitution in the campus community. ‘Not only as artists and advocates of Hip Hop, but also as educators, community organizers, and human rights activists. 206 Zulu fully supports the Evergreen’s Hip Hop Congress chapter and broader student body in utilizing the culture as a vehicle to spread awareness, and a platform for positive, productive social change,’ says Julie C, NW Regional Coordinator for Hip Hop Congress and 206 Zulu assistant chapter-head.” (Schulman, 2008, p.3)

This event forced the organization to review its national standing and reputation while simultaneously assessing the way the national office communicated, disseminated and responded to situations which occur at individual chapters around the country and abroad.

The 9th annual conference was planned as collaboration between Hip Hop Congress and two major power brokers: Allied Media and the U.S. Social Forum. In toll there were over 20,000 participants from all over the United States, Canada, Europe, South Africa and Brazil, according to Real Detroit Weekly (Ninneman, 2010). All three conferences happened sequentially over a ten-day period beginning with the Allied Media Conference, then the U.S. Social Forum, and concluding with the Hip Hop Congress 9th Annual Conference. These partnerships were solidified over the 10 day period with each organization attending and participating in all three conferences. Currently all three organizations are collaborating on media literacy programs in various cities.

Another collaboration that has come to define Hip Hop Congress’ alliances with meaningful activist organizations is their engagement with the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC). The PPEHRC is the country’s first and only domestic human rights organization founded and led by poor people. With alliances in over 120 different groups and organizations, the alliance with Hip Hop Congress was a natural fit in the fact that both
organizations service the underrepresented and look to unite across color and economic boundaries. The alliance with the PPEHRC tied into the conference in a very meaningful and impactful way. Both organizations created and participated in a protest march entitled *March to Fulfill the Dream*. In a letter written urging the participation of as many individuals and organizations spanning across seven states (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio and Michigan) and taking two and a half months to complete (April 4-June 21), PPEHRC President Khalilah Collins and National Organizer Cheri Honkala explained the significance and relevance of the march:

“Beginning in New Orleans, the *March to Fulfill the Dream* will travel from the eye of Katrina on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, to Detroit, the eye of the economic storm – where decades of abandonment throughout the region by industry and government have left hundreds of thousands unemployed, homeless and hungry, and without basic needs such as heat, water and healthcare.” (Collin & Honkala, 2010)

Hip Hop Congress members walked the entire distance with the organization, stopping along the way at homes, churches, colleges and any other place where they could find refuge and get a meal. Several Hip Hop Congress chapters participated by feeding and finding places for them to rest overnight and utilizing the group’s mission and journey to educate their communities about the eradication of poverty through active protest. Shortly after the completion of the march, Hip Hop Congress’ executive director resigned his position for an advisory role and an artist role in the organization, accepting a position as the executive director of the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign.
IV. Community Work and National Initiatives

“Build a home, teach a class, start a revolution
Free the mind, heal the body, talking evolution.”
(Jay Electronica, 2010)

Hip Hop Congress is very special in many ways. One of the great aspects about the organization is that it started from very humble beginnings with not much more than an idea and a few people who decided to come together to make a difference with very little training and even less of an idea of how large scale this would become. In a very abstract way, the organization exists, grows and continues to grow on the sheer desire of those connected with the organization to believe in a nebulous concept that some view as ridiculous and idiotic – that lives can be changed through the “positive promotion” of hip hop culture. After all, hip hop has been blamed for most of the adolescent social ills in contemporary society (Beachum & McCray, 2011). What makes this group different from others in its thinking that those who are negatively affected by that which is blamed for the negativity can essentially utilize the negativity to positively affect? This is a question that virtually any Congress member would gladly and eagerly answer. The answer most likely will deal with the influential power of hip hop for both good and bad, but given positive direction could be a utility for empowerment and the fostering of creativity.

“... Hip Hop Congress leadership is constantly developing progressive initiatives to foster inspiration and action in local communities. The leadership also develops strategic partnerships with other organizations throughout the country to promote and engage in social action, civic service, and cultural creativity.” (www.hiphopcongress.org)
Second to the drive and passion of the membership to progressively affect change within the communities which they represent is their strategic alignment with other organizations most from similar origins reliant on the cultural and communal capital.

On the Hip Hop Congress website, there are five main links that will assist on the navigation of the website: Home, About Hip Hop Congress, Contact Us, Chapters and Affiliates. The last link “Affiliates” is possibly one of the most important aspects of the website. In the link, it shows all forty-four organizations that Hip Hop Congress has partnered with to service various communities while addressing many issues within hip hop culture such as misogyny, issues within education, the struggle for human rights, electoral politics, workers’ rights and the rejection of violence amongst other things.

a. Rejection of Misogyny in Hip Hop Culture

According to Adams and Fuller (2006), Misogyny is defined as “an ideology of hatred or disdain of women, which reduces women to expendable objects of ownership, use or abuse” (p. 939). They go on to posit that misogyny does not exist in a vacuum, but is connected to a larger socio-economic, socio-cultural ideology. Misogyny in American society is pervasive and reveals itself through the very striations of our social structure. The reality of sexist thoughts and actions are dictated by race, religion, class, education and wealth (Smith, 1991). Historically, misogynistic sentiment has its roots in American culture from the inception of this country (Hooks, 1981), so to find this ideology in the form of rap music is apparent of its
transcendent permeability even in the earliest rap recordings. Most will be led to believe that misogynistic rap began at the advent of gangsta rap.

The first commercial rap song was released in September of 1979. The song “Rappers Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang was an instant success. During the same period of time according to Chang (2005), indie record labels saw the potential of putting their raps honed in the South Bronx parks on wax. One of the first records released in 1979 after “Rappers Delight” was a song by former Treacherous Three member Gabriel “Spoonie Gee” Jackson. Spoonie Gee, who is also credited for coining the phrase “Hip Hop,” released a song called Love Rap (1979). This song was not about love but actually about Spoonie Gee’s love of “fast girls and cheap sex” (p.133). In this song, one of the first five rap songs released, he raps about meeting a lady and her getting in his car because she knew he was a star. They then go to his house where she proceeds to beg him to have his baby during sex. He tells her no, because he doesn’t want to give her any money. After sex, he then proceeds to tell her that he had seen her in the streets before and she didn’t speak, insinuating that she finally spoke because of his newfound status. Spoonie Gee goes on to rap, “…you can’t lead yourself cause you’ve been lead / this the same young girl that messed up your head / everytime you turn around she’s askin for yo money / she thinks it’s cool and she thinks it’s funny.” The message in this early rap song feeds into the stereotype of the woman as sexually promiscuous and a gold digger. From this song it is apparent that misogynistic lyrics and messages have been around as long as rap music has been recorded.
Another early pioneer of hip hop is Mohandas Kool Moe Dee Dewese. Ironically from the same rap group which produced Spoonie Gee, The Treacherous Three, Kool Moe Dee wrote a song called “Go See the Doctor” (1986) a few years after his former group member Spoonie Gee. The song begins with Kool Moe Dee meeting a young woman and telling her that they can talk about the birds and bees and his water bed and that she can treat him like a Buddha and bow her head, insinuating oral sex. They proceed to go to his house and have sex after which time he says he lost his poise ran outside and told all his boys. He tells his boys “the poon tang was dope and you know that I rocked her but three days later go see the doctor.” The imagery in this song portrays the woman as sexually promiscuous and disease-infested. The images painted in these two songs are relatively tame compared to the images and language used by rappers after the Treacherous Three rappers. There are definite trends in the way that misogyny is used within rap lyrics. Many rap artists such as Spoonie Gee and Kool Moe Dee, both respected as pioneers of hip hop culture, are more subtle using “mild innuendos to extreme and excessively blatant defamations” (Adams and Fuller, 2006, p. 941).

During the same year in 1986, Joseph “Just Ice” Williams Jr. released a song that eclipsed the two aforementioned songs in graphic content and language. The song “This Girl is a Slut” was the B-side to his single “LaToya” (1986). In the song he sings the chorus over a beat box, “this girl is a slut / she’s got crabbys up her butt / she’s got a smelly little cock that loaded with funk, and um boogers hanger of her butt.” The chorus is rather conservative compared to the verses where he says upon seeing her at the door that “this girl is gonna suck my cock.” He then proceeds to explicitly recount his sexual encounter with this young woman by singing “she
swallowed it, inch by inch, she swallowed it, but it did not pinch / she swallowed every inch of it down / she took the juice and she swished it around.”

2 Live Crew, a Miami rap group who were known for their raunchy lyrics came out with an album called “2 Live Crew is What We Are” (1986). On the album were two songs that pushed the envelope even further than before. The songs “We Want Some Pussy” and “Throw That Dick” were quite different than their misogynistic predecessors in that the 2 Live Crew gratuitously and blatantly used the words bitch and hoe throughout the album. The use of the terms opened the floodgates for progenies of gangsta rappers to ubiquitously use the words with reckless abandon. Another word that 2 Live Crew made infamous in rap music is the word “Hoochie.” Patricia Hill Collins (2000) ruminates on the significance of the word and connects it to the sordid history of misogyny within African American culture by comparing the word “Hoochie” to “Jezebel.” Collins writes:

“Rooted in the historical legacy of jezebel, the contemporary ‘hoochie’ seems to be cut from an entirely different cloth. For one, whereas images of Black women as sexually aggressive certainly pervade popular culture overall, the image of the hoochie seems to have permeated everyday Black culture in entirely new ways. For example, 2 Live Crew’s song ‘Hoochie Mama’ takes Black women bashing to new heights. In this song, the group opens with the rallying cry ‘big booty hoes hop with it!’ and proceeds to list characteristics of the ‘hoodrat hoochie mama.’” (p.82)

Dr. Collins juxtaposes the current terminology used in contemporary rap songs like “Hoochie” to the historic words Jezebel and Sapphire. The term “Jezebel” was a word used during slavery to justify the rape of slaves by slave masters, through believing the black woman to be inherently sexually deviant and writhe with lasciviousness. Jezebels, according to classic
definition, want and accept sexual encounters in any form from men and often use those sexual encounters as a means of favor or material acquisition from men (Hoe). Sapphires were women who ruled their households and their men with relentless hostility and belligerence (Bitch).

Gwendolyn Pough (2004) agrees with Collins’ assertion of the hoochie as a negative term used to denigrate black womanhood. However, she disagrees with Collins’ definition of the hoochie as just a sexually promiscuous woman or simply the reincarnation of the Jezebel. Pough believes that within hip hop culture the hoochie can mean sexually promiscuous, but the terms has taken on several other meanings within the context of urban life. Beyond the sexual impetus of word, the term has come to mean a woman (often the lowest in status as a member of the group) who hangs with a bunch of guys or quite simply a girl from the ghetto. Inevitably the terms have deep seeded roots in a culture of oppressiveness which either directly or indirectly influence black male/female relationships. This dynamic has influenced the very context of rap lyrics and these misogynistic lyrics invariably influenced the interpersonal relationships of those who acculturate rap music.

In order to fully understand misogyny in rap music and its destructive impetus, one must look beyond the words rhythmically spewed to a syncopated drum pattern and understand that there is a pervasive ideology at work, an ideology which has had a profound influence on all aspects of society and culture in this country. Rose (2008) suggests that “throughout the U.S. history that white men defining women’s status and value, the systematic assumption that only white women would be able to reach the highest (but still subordinate-to-men) role of
womanhood was a key element of women’s oppression” (p. 152). The white male hegemonic structure during slavery defined white womanhood by defining the antithesis of her feminine quality, hence the deviant categorization of black womanhood. This systematic categorization also allowed for the easing of the conscience during dehumanizing acts against black women. Rose (2008) goes on to say: “Sexism against black women took place in racially specific ways involving the labeling of their sexuality as automatically deviant and uncontrollable, and the claim that they were unfit as mothers. Key sexual myths shape the three primary stereotypes about black women: the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes are defined by their ‘dysfunctional’ sexuality and motherhood” (p. 152).

The sexist labeling of black women from slavery until the present has been fairly surreptitious and clandestine in its influence on society. Outside of the Moynahan report (1965), negative views of black women as Bitches and Hos have relatively been the punch lines of jokes and the topic of behind close door conversations in popular culture. Every so often, the script of the bitch and the hoe would be reprised in movies and rarely could be decoded in some R&B, but it was not until rap music that the roles were blatantly enacted through stories of odious women secretly plotting the demise of the storyteller or through indiscretionary and reprehensible sexual acts. Recently, the objectification of women has taken another turn. Since the aforementioned group 2 Live Crew married rap music and hip hop culture in the mid to late 1980s, there has been a proliferation of acts primarily from the south that have created songs about the objectification of women while in a party or strip club setting, further adding a new dimension to misogyny in rap music.
Hip Hop Congress, in the midst of an outgrowth of sexist messages in hip hop culture with the release of videos like Nelly’s tip drill video where the rapper slides a credit card down the backside of a video girl, the female leadership created an initiative to stem the tide of misogyny in hip hop culture. The project was originally conceived to positively highlight contributions made by women in hip hop culture, catalogue literature, songs and movies about women in hip hop, and create a series of lessons to educate about women’s issues amidst the male dominated culture of hip hop. These initiatives were achieved, but what happened was an outpouring of support from other women’s groups who were proud of the work done by Hip Hop Congress and partnerships were soon forged in the name of women’s empowerment.

The Women’s Project was designed to creatively engage students with exercises like getting students to guess the female hip hop artist by presenting clues about the artist’s life. Another exercise equips children with skill sets that permit them to learn what terms like “misogyny” and “sexism” are and recognize songs and videos that utilize these defamatory agents within the content of the songs. Images from hip hop magazines and music videos are also utilized to address issues around positive body image. Participants of the sessions are given magazines and are instructed to cut and paste images of sexism and negative body image. Oftentimes documentaries are used to introduce and address issues around male dominance and misogyny in hip hop using such documentaries like Byron Hurd’s critically acclaimed picture Beyond Beats and Rhymes (2006). At the end of each session the participants are given a resource packet of women issues within hip hop for further exploration.
During the 2007 Hip Hop Congress Conference in Athens, the Athens chapter, mostly comprised of women, partnered with a battered women’s shelter called *My Sister’s Place*. This became one of the factors in choosing the site for the conference, because of its women centered initiatives. This decision signaled the importance of a concerted effort on the part of Hip Hop Congress to support and aid in the development of women centered projects. Like-minded groups who educate women like Women’s Economic Agenda Project (WEAP) from Oakland, California have found common ground with the Women’s Project, and they now collaborate to empower women in the Bay Area of California. Both projects support economic justice for poor women and their families. Both groups also assist with training, emotional support and mediate resource allocation to women while working to change societal and governmental policies that relegate women to the lowest realms of the social strata. The projects differ slightly because the Women’s Project deals with all of these issues including educating young women who are directly affected by the negative aspects of hip hop culture, assisting them in success in the larger community (See Appendix E & F).

b. Hip Hop in Public Education

Hip hop in academia and as a pedagogical tool in K-16 has come to fruition amidst the reluctance of those academicians and pertinacious educators who view the traditional canon as the only appropriate tool of learning. Subsequent cohorts of educators are in favor of alternative education but feel inadequately prepared to utilize the emerging praxis as it relates to teaching through various lenses (Mahiri, 2004). The question who should teach alternative forms of pedagogy such as hip hop education is being asked in schools across America. It has
been argued that hip hop cannot be understood nor taught without a firm understanding of
and personal involvement with the culture and the environment which birthed it (Schloss,
2009). Essentially, can an educator find common ground with the ever-changing culture which
drives his or her students’ imagination and attention, while improving educational indicators in
the classroom?

While hip hop is not the first cultural medium to be introduced into the classroom as a
tool of engagement, it must be stated that it is not the first to be distrusted. Textbooks,
textbook covers, curricular tie-ins from corporations such as Disney, and Channel One are all
examples of materials that have all been distrusted by educators (Mussman, 2009). This paper
examines hip hop education through the lens of trust in order to demonstrate its educational
viability. Teachers look for materials that have experts behind them, allow for them to increase
their professional track, and demonstrate consistency. Hip hop education provides all of these
aspects.

The culture of hip hop has been in existence for over thirty years. Since its interpolated
inception amid the disappointments of the civil rights and black power movement, the
deindustrialization of the inner cities across America and the erosion of social programs for
New York youth, hip hop has been a voice for often disenfranchised youth (Chang, 2004; Light,
1999; Rose, 1994). Inevitably the very elements which catalyzed the derivation of hip hop
remain in many landscapes across America. Quite simply, hip hop speaks to students in a
manner which instructs all to take notice of its cultural predominance. Often there are strong
correlations between student disinterest with traditional education and intense interest in hip
hop culture (Hall, 1998). Many educators who are biased by their lack of understanding of the
culture and more importantly their disconnection with their students demonize hip hop – this is
one reason for the vacuity of interest toward traditional education.

Baszile (2009) suggests the opposite notion to those distrustful of hip hop education. She contends that hip hop and other forms of youthful expression, when omitted or dismissed as unimportant or devoid of educational value, allow students to recognize the structural vacuity of interest towards them as authentic learners. “To some extent it is our conception and practice of schooling that actually lays a foundation for both the deformative and transformative dynamics of hip hop culture. In the schoolhouse, tensions are evident not only in many educators’ personal disassociation with hip hop and other forms of youth culture but they are also institutionalized through traditional schooling” (p. 7). Traditional educators miss out on an important opportunity here to act in a benevolent way.

It must be mentioned that hip hop culture, since its media explosion in the early 1990s, has garnered a negative image and reputation, which has been exploited as the justification for many adolescent ills. Through various messages that promote and glorify misogyny, violence, nihilism and other self-destructive values, commercial hip hop has transcended popular culture (George, 1996). The mere notion of introducing an educational tool into the classroom imbued with such hyper-destructiveness would be counterintuitive. Many outside of the hip hop culture, in particular, educators who operate from the perspective that traditional canons are the only curricula appropriate to be taught, tend to view the classroom as a sacred space that would be unable to cope with the creativity of hip hop.
In addition to the glorification of traditional institutionalized learning methods, Smith (2006) asserts that many educators believe that using popular culture and more specifically hip hop references, will oversimplify more complex subject matter. The ephemeral nature of popular culture, which as rule states, ‘what’s hot today is not tomorrow,’ poses risks to educators in terms of creating curricula consistent with that which they do not understand nor is static. Smith posits that subject matter which is now part of the traditional canons, at one time was popular culture.

Shakespeare and Mozart are two examples given as to popular culture of the time turned classic. Appropriately enough, hip hop in the future will likely be seen as classic subject matter. Runell Hall (2009) illustrates hip hop education’s validity and its ascent into the academy:

“Hip hop music and culture are often cited as being public pedagogy, meaning the music itself has intrinsic educational value. Classes on hip hop are offered at Berkeley, Stanford, Michigan, Yale, MIT, NYU, Princeton, University of Massachusetts, and Columbia. In fact it is estimated that there are over 300 courses on hip hop being taught in the United States currently, and Howard University, after being the first to bring hip hop to the academy in 1991 will soon have a hip hop studies minor.” (p.86)

The notion of utilizing hip hop as content and form is not a new. Many educators have used popular culture and hip hop culture as vehicles for students’ self-expression. One common and earliest ways educators have utilized hip hop education is through the analyzing of hip hop lyrics and videos to tease out subtle yet powerful messages and imagery in the culture which they are a part of (Lee, 2007). The method employed utilizes hip hop as public pedagogy. Public pedagogy is defined as “the analysis of mainstream rap production in a way
that recognizes the pedagogical importance of its sounds, images and ideologies” (Hendershott, 2004, pp. 3-4).

Similarly, other educators have advanced the potential of hip hop as an engine for social justice and societal change (Runell & Diaz, 2007). Hip hop culture began in part as a way to negotiate roles as marginalized youth in an ever-changing society tainted by the negative implications of race and class in America. These realities helped shape the political direction of the culture and the music forever. Educators such as Duncan-Andrade (2006), Morrell (2006 & 2007) and Hill (2009) have used the political overtones of the culture as a lens in which to gird adolescents. Through critical hip hop pedagogy, students are able to view their own existence and experiences as linked to a larger institutional structure and view inequity as a systemic ill to be addressed (Akom, 2009).

Skeptics of hip hop culture as subject matter oftentimes fail to see the aforementioned value of hip hop education. Pointing to the negativity of rap music and the counter culture which hip hop represents while omitting the creativity, viability and impact the culture, of which rap music is a part of, has played on a global scale in less than forty years. Conversely, those educators who shun hip hop as literature for example, revere the canonization of “classic” literature. Most teach the institutionalized standard literature, but oftentimes are unaware of what constitutes a literary canon. The canonization of a literary work implies a certain authority or process of validation concerning a book. Once a work is canonized it is “officially” included in a select number of literary works that are widely accepted and respected
as such. Those who have the “authority” to canonize include scholars, teachers, literary critics and those whose opinion is widely respected.

Literary canons remain in a state of constant change primarily because the judgment of those who create the canon changes, as well as the opinions and experiences of those who write and read the works. Literature is primarily affected by the context in which the work is read and synthesized with the experience of the reader. Context is very important when denoting a work as a classic. Often, works that gain societal pertinence and contextually resonate with contemporary readers are considered for canonization. This can be interpreted as popular literature which is firmly grounded in relevant changes in society through popular thoughts and movements. Hip hop as a culture falls into this category. Additionally, canons are based on the popularity of the work and its relevance to the artistic, social and historical context it gains authority from. Literary works of respect and popularity are usually predicated on the interest of the masses, and their opinion weighs on the importance of the work. Similarly, hip hop music’s popularity has surpassed many more traditional American musical genres (Heath, 2006) and has had a profound effect on American society, so much so that it should not be considered taboo to incorporate into the standard curricula. Additionally, nonbiased discourse on hip hop-centered education’s relevance to institutionalized learning is long past due.

Educators emboldened by the possibility of engaging or reengaging their students in a new, powerful and more meaningful way should seek out ways to synthesize popular culture and more specifically, hip hop, into the standard curricula. Understanding that the world our
youth have inherited, good, bad or indifferent, is constantly evolving, and most of our young
parse out meaning through popular culture. It should be the obligation of educators, teachers
and scholars alike to strengthen the pedagogical sinews of learning with “real world” reflective
doses. Paulo Freire (1993), the author of the widely read and revered book *Pedagogy of the
Oppressed* and whose works are celebrated as an educational literary canon wrote:

“Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they
work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they
skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know
independently of the school, and how they know it.” (page 72)

These concepts slowly dissipate within the stringent realities of standardized state-
mandated testing and performance-based evaluative measures. Teachers must not lose sight
of the importance of capturing the imagination and supporting the dreams of their students.

When ruminating on the past and present benefits of trusting in hip hop as a tool of
education and empowerment, several positive outcomes can be surmised. Educators must
recognize the individual value of expanding the horizon of their students through alternate
forms of teaching; in so doing is the conduit in which a new canon is being established.
Acknowledging the importance of hip hop scholarship in the academic realm lends teacher-
driven validation to the growth of its body of literature, simultaneously promoting the growth
and development of young scholars in the area. In addition, in recent years the hip hop
educational community has created several organizations such as The Hip Hop Association’s
Educational Initiative (H2Ed), Hip Hop Congress’ Urban Teachers Network (UTN), The University
of Hip Hop, Russell Simmon’s Hip Hop Literacy Program, Kanye West’s educational program
Loop Dreams, and many other programs as a resource for educators and aspiring student-teachers. Aesthetically, the classroom utilization of innovative forms of teaching, in conjunction with the support of such aforementioned organizations, can present endless possibilities for subject materials in the classroom that reach students while inspiring consistency in student creativity – which remains one of the primary goals of the educational process.

Hip Hop Congress can trace its roots through a strong legacy of activism. The movement continues through justice-centered community programming and the implementation of a concept called “Hip Hop Education.” According to one of the founders and current president of Hip Hop Congress, there are over fifty programs implemented by various Hip Hop Congress chapters around the country that incorporate hip hop programming into schools and community centers. Hip Hop Education is used in K-12 classrooms, after-school programs, prisons, community organizing, leadership camps, and universities. The educational doctrines are utilized in textbooks, children’s books, nursery rhymes, dictionaries, documentaries, and hip hop education websites (Runell & Diaz, 2007). To many hip hop activism is a calling, while to others it is an opportunity to assist social change. Regardless of one’s own orientation to Hip Hop Education, very few will deny its ability to empower and change lives. Hip Hop Congress is actively engaged in that transformative process.

Adolescents in cognate peer groups use music as a way to negotiate interpersonal relationships in terms of expressing, identifying and articulating similar emotions (Epstein, 1994). This pervasive connectivity between youth culture and music, culminating in
consumption of popular culture, must be observed as a force in terms of the formation of adolescent identity. The consumption of popular culture, without a lens in which to parse out many negative images, renders adolescents subjugated to the acculturation of those images (Dolby, 2003). Hip Hop Education, when used as an analytical tool, allows adolescents to more critically disseminate the stimuli produced by popular culture. In addition to Hip Hop Education’s ability to help critically engage adolescents, it can also reinvigorate students’ love for learning by introducing them to socially and culturally relevant ways of teaching traditional canons (Morrell & Duncan, 2002). While many scholars and others simply decry the current abysmal state of education, hip hop educators or the educators who see the power of implementing alternative forms of education have channeled adolescent culture into standard curricula.

“Hip Hop Congress has been on the forefront of the creation and implementation of hip hop educational curricula. Many of the leadership are educators by trade and see a natural and urgent reciprocity between hip hop and education. One of the creators of the Urban Teachers Network says: ‘Hip Hop has four core elements: B-boying, DJing, MCing, and Graffiti, but the fifth element that Afrika Bambaata and others claim as the ever-present force that exists within the culture, the ubiquitous envelop of the culture is knowledge. So it only makes sense that hip hop education appeal to students as well as complements any curriculum.’” (S. Harris, personal communication, July 29, 2009)

This educator and Hip Hop Congress member goes on to suggest that the next wave of activism for social change will come from the ranks of activists who understand the revolutionary power in the educational process.

In less than a decade, Hip Hop Congress has been able to procure chapters in many major cities in the U. S. and on three continents without an annual budget. Most of the
programs that are conducted in many schools and community centers around the country are curricula created by individuals within the organization, most of whom implement work as educators or recreation staff. The educator, when asked how so much has been accomplished with limited resources said: “We simply have borrowed from the grassroots efforts of the civil rights movement. They did not have any money, but look what they achieved? Money complicates things most times. So I don’t think that the whole money thing should be even mentioned when it’s word of mouth and our individual commitments that make Congress what it is and what it will become.” (S. Harris, personal communication, July 29, 2009)

Recently, a group of Hip Hop Congress members have come together to create the Urban Teachers Network (UTN). The UTN as it is also referred to, has a website where educators find support for one another, share lesson plans, and network as well. Hip Hop Congress continues to create innovative ways to galvanize the ranks of hip hop activists as they preserve the culture and continue the struggle for a better world.

The Urban Teachers Network utilizes the modern technology of facebook to connect participants of the network. The facebook group is seeking to define regional Urban Teachers Network groups to better define local participants in hopes of creating a strong and cohesive national UTN infrastructure that will assist in doing the following: 1) Creating an ongoing database of educators and mentors working directly with the youth in the community; 2) Promoting urban arts education and hip hop pedagogy; 3) Sharing effective curricular and extracurricular ideas; 4) Creating, maintaining and sharing digital online classroom resources; 5) Fostering regional support groups; and 6) Organizing UTN events outside of the classroom
for student enrichment and mentoring (Harris, 2010). This conglomerate is designed to, when utilized effectively, strengthen hip hop pedagogy and create a support system of educators extrapolated from urban cores. As the educational system continues to fail low-income students of color, Hip Hop Congress has accepted to mantel of ownership in introducing an alternative curriculum and solution. Hip Hop Congress, along with many other like-minded organizations who see the validity in hip hop culture’s transformative capacity, have partnered with others to maximize the effort of re-engaging youth in the educational process.

c. Electoral Politics and The Hip Hop Generation

On April 19, 2008, then-Senator Barack Obama, fresh from one of the many democratic debates, addressed an energized crowd in Raleigh, North Carolina. As he began his speech, he recounted the heated democratic debates from the previous three nights. Admittedly, Obama shared with the crowd that has taken some mighty blows (criticisms, barbs, harsh denunciations) from his democratic counterparts. Beleaguered but still resilient, Obama said, “but that’s politics... ultimately you’ve got to...” and did something that only a certain demographic could conceptualize in the moment that it happened: he brushed the dirt off his shoulders, repeatedly. The crowd erupted with unbridled cheers as then-Senator Obama’s repeated hand brush across the shoulder of his tailored suit solidified himself as the hip hop candidate. What most of America missed in the interim is Obama’s reference to a song written and performed by Shawn “Jay-Z “ Carter entitled “Get That Dirt Off Your Shoulder.” The song which implores its listeners to brush off negativity and look beyond pettiness was befitting of the moment, but only to those who got the gesture. That widely interpretive moment was the
equivalent of Tommie Smith and John Carlos’ black power salute at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico.

Toward the latter part of Obama’s campaign, the man who in an interview admitted to having Jay-Z and other hip hop artists on his ipod, reached out to Shawn “Jay-Z” Carter for assistance with the last leg of his bid for the presidency. Jay-Z, along with others such as Mary J. Blige, Ludacris, Sean P. Diddy Combs and others, all spent the last few weeks leading up to election day, November 4, 2008, making appearances all across the country on college campuses and other youth-centered venues urging undecided voters to hit the polls for Barack Obama. This strategy assisted in ensuring Obama’s lead margin moving into election night. In retrospect Jay-Z on his multiplatinum album, The Blueprint 3, triumphantly raps about his relationship and effort in helping Obama secure the presidency on the song entitled “What We Talkin Bout,” where he says, “a small part of the reason that the president is black / I told him I got ‘em when he hit me on the jack”. He professed to the world that he accepted Barack Obama’s solicitation for help in coercing the hip hop generation to cast aside its political lethargy and awaken politically embolden. The hip hop generation responded.

Hip hop culture is birthed out of the politics of the civil rights movement and the black power movement (Rose, 1994; Kitwana, 2005; Chang, 2005), and now benefits from the gains by both movements. Kitwana (2008), in a lecture given to Hip Hop Congress during the 2008 National Conference, suggests that hip hop is an emerging force politically and that hip hop has made politics fashionable to the young, but will not get credit for its political side because of a lack of documentation from hip hop. He goes on to say that many political pundits have the
“Obama Phenomenon” all wrong. Kitwana theorizes that the President’s (then Senator) campaign was not the driving force behind the youth vote turning out to the polls; Kitwana says that Obama was the recipient of an already mobilized hip hop voting base. Kitwana says that in 2004, over 21 million voters between the ages of 18-24 turned out to support John Kerry and the democrats, nearly a 5 million voter increase from the 2000 election. In turn the 2004 election witnessed 60% of eligible voters show up to the polls to let their voice be heard; this is the highest participation of eligible voters since the 1964 election (Kitwana, 2008).

Kitwana also believes that those who consider themselves as part of the hip hop generation have experienced life from a profoundly different vantage point than those of just a previous generation. He theorizes that being born in a post-segregated America has severely altered the identity of the hip hop generation, which has also realigned their concept of struggle, race and the American dream. Kelli Goff, a political savvy, author and former aid to Hillary Clinton, agrees with Kitwana’s perspective on the hip hop generation and its divergent perspective which has reshaped the identity of the progeny of civil rights struggle. In the book “Party Crashing: How the Hip Hop Generation Declared Political Independence,” Goff (2008) predicted that the hip hop generation was ready to cast aside the preconceived notion that blacks would as in the past instinctively vote democratic without analyzing and weighing its options divorced from bipartisan rhetoric. The point was also made that the hip hop generation was a formative force politically and would decidedly disincline blind allegiance like their parents just a generation before.
The book, Party Crashing, was fortuitous in the fact that it was researched, written and released mere months before Barack Obama declared his presidency on the steps of the Illinois State House. When asked post-election night about the overwhelming numbers of young hip hop generation demographic voters who definitively voted democrat, Goff suggests that Obama was the right candidate for the hip hop generation because he was able to connect on a level not previously conceptualized. In addition, the hip hop generation supported him for his views which were very closely reflective of their feelings of political abandonment, Goff explains:

“The main thing that happened is that the political establishment and media completely underestimated (or as President Bush might say, ‘misunderestimated’) the strength of some key constituencies that Barack Obama did not (underestimate) – namely younger voters as well as black voters. I sometimes joke that I would have loved to be a fly on the wall when Obama first confided to his advisers that he believed he had a viable path to the White House – and that path was on the shoulders of younger voters and black voters.” (Hazen, 2008, p. 1)

The 2008 elections was an example of how mobilizing a forgotten voting base can yield great results. The hip hop generation showed up for Barack Obama and assisted him in winning the presidency.

According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), a group which promotes the civil engagement of Americans, a preliminary study after election night showed that young adults were the deciding factor in the 2008 election. CIRCLE reports in its national exit poll that 2.2 million more voters between the ages of 18 and 29 voted compared to 4 years previously. It is also reported that between 21.6
million and 23.9 million young voters turned out as a voting bloc (CIRCLE, 2008). What was the driving force behind the large turnout which voted for Obama by a 2 to 1 margin? If Obama wasn’t the candidate, would the outcome have been the same for another candidate? Dr. Maya Rockeymoore (2004), author of the book, “The Political Action Handbook: A How to Guide for the Hip Hop Generation,” suggests that the groundwork was laid through grassroots efforts of many politically astute young adults that have urged the hip hop generation to hone their skills of political engagement. According to the book which was filled with useful websites, publications, organizations and other political resources, if these steps were utilized the voting bloc could be a possibility. Obama and his connective sensibility to young urban voters made the plan for the hip hop generation come together.

The question was raised, what if it was not Barack Obama and it was another candidate, would the voter outcome have been the same for the hip hop generation? That is an important question. There was another candidate who ran on a 2008 presidential ticket and actually ran on a hip hop platform, but was overshadowed by the “Obama-mania.” Rosa Clemente, the co-founder of the National Hip Hop Convention, an instrumental part of The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, REACH (Representing Education Activism and Community through Hip Hop), and former director of the Hip Hop Caucus, ran on the Green Party Ticket as the vice-presidential candidate. In the article "The Hip Hop Community Has to Go Green" introducing the Green Party Candidates (Cynthia McKinney and Rosa Clemente), Thompson (2008) says this of Clemente and her pro hip hop agenda:

“Clemente feels the Green Party can attract voters by bringing hip hop political questions to bear on the presidential campaigns. The hip hop agenda includes
addressing the need for expanded criminal and economic justice and educational opportunities for non-wealthy Americans. For many in the hip hop community, presidential politics should mostly concern expanding and guarding human rights – the right not to be abused or singled out by the police, the right to affordable healthcare, to real protections against gender and race discriminations, the right to federal assistance in the wake of a disaster, for example.” (p.1)

Although Clemente’s pro hip hop agenda was spelled out and catered to the hip hop generation specifically, she did not get very many endorsements from hip hop. According to the official McKinney/Clemente website, only two endorsements came from the hip hop ranks. Professor Griff of hip hop group Public Enemy and M1 of hip hop group Dead Prez were the only groups reported to have endorsed the ticket. There may be more endorsements that may not have been mentioned, knowing that Hip Hop Congress endorsed the ticket at the Biloxi, Mississippi Conference. Hip Hop Congress may have been one of the only other hip hop organizations that endorsed the pro hip hop agenda. Understandably most of hip hop threw its support behind a more viable contending candidate in Barack Obama, but there were those organizations such as Hip Hop Congress who shunned the path well-traveled and went with a candidate that fully supported a hip hop agenda in McKinney and Clemente. This is not to say that Obama is not sympathetic to the hip hop cause but to have a candidate which lay out a platform specifically focused on urban core issues was the determining factor in receiving a ringing endorsement from Hip Hop Congress. Prior to the election, Clemente superscribed Obama as the right candidate for hip hop: “[Obama] is the leader we’ve been looking for,” Clemente said, “he is that candidate.” (Ewing, 2008).
d. Union Activism and the Hip Hop Alliance

Hip Hop and union activism have a lot more in common than not. The fact that the emergence of the culture is closely tied to the deindustrialization of the inner city, many labor forces were also negatively affected by the loss of jobs in the late 60s and 70s in the urban cores of America. In the book “When Work Disappears: The World Of The New Urban Poor,” William Julius Wilson (1997) recounts factors for the disappearance of inner city jobs, which includes job relocation (many exported outside the U.s.), black middle class flight, industrial realignments, suburbanization of employment and racism. His solution for deindustrialization and the vast job hemorrhaging in inner city areas is the “race neutral” revamping of the Work Progress Administration (WPA). Wilson’s proposal suggests that labor should reassess the post-depression work program of the 1930s which put all to work in the community. This plan would not only put all able-bodied people to work, but would also “create common values amongst all in the community and create a communal life worth reclaiming” (p. 176).

Michael Honey, an award-winning author and historian, makes clear connections between the black labor in the south and the civil rights movement in the books “Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers” (1993), “Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign” (2008), and “All Labor Has Dignity” (2011). In all three literary renderings, Honey chronicles the southern industrial union and its influence on the civil rights struggle for equality. From the Great Depression through the Memphis Garbage strike, Honey masterfully accounts the arduous labor fights and valiant efforts of organizers to equalize labor and bring about the demise of segregation. More
importantly, Honey’s work funnels the events of the southern labor movement and helps to put the Memphis Garbage Strike and Dr. King’s efforts there in a larger context to history and race relations, which in a distal way is akin to the activism that spawned hip hop resistance.

The alignment of activism and workers rights has had a long tradition in the struggle against capitalism and fair labor practices. Modern alliances between activism and labor can most famously be traced back to Dr. Martin Luther King’s efforts with the Memphis Garbage workers strike. It was in this city that Dr. King was assassinated and it is suggested that it was his activism around labor which essentially brought about his demise on April 4, 1968 (Dyson, 2008). African American sanitation workers led by T.O. Jones, the American Federation of State, and County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) who went on strike for safer work environments, pay increases and job security took it to the streets with the support of Dr. King and a divided black leadership. It was also during this very moment in the civil rights movement that the black leadership was forced to acknowledge the Black Power Movement as King’s non-violent tactics could not extinguish the confrontational protest of young activists in Memphis, Tennessee.

Shortly after the posthumous, riotous reaction of the black community to the death of Dr. King, the city of Memphis signed the city’s first contract with black workers, which lead to subsequent contractual arrangements with blacks in many industries with mass labor requirements. Blacks in Selective Service and Public Sector jobs most benefited from the legislation signed between the city of Memphis and black labor (Appleby, Graham & Ross, 1993). Since that time it is reported that blacks are the most likely ethnic group to join a labor
union in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003). According to the same study, blacks are more likely to be unionized (16.5%) than whites (12.5%), Hispanics (10.7%) and Asians (11.4%). This suggests that in spite of systemic discriminatory practices within predominately white labor unions, blacks willingly choose to support the inclusionary and anti-discriminatory ideologies of labor unions, even if the reality doesn’t align in praxis (Needleman, 2003). This reality has led to problems within the ranks of many unions who consistently fail to allow the leadership to reflect proportional demographic representation.

According to Fitts (2005), electoral politics have played a key role in the attempt to destabilize unions. With the passage of the “Right to Work” legislation in 23 states in 2005 and now most recently the Collective Bargaining agreements in many states which limits the ability for unions to bargain, legislation has affected the effectiveness of unions. President Ronald Reagan’s treatment of labor in 1981, with the firing of striking unionized air traffic controllers, sent a clear message that conservative elements in government would go to great lengths to diminish labor unions. His stance on unions also set the tone for his conservative agenda (Manning, 2000). During the Reagan years, not only were his policies detrimental to labor organizing, they were also continuous to labor for adolescents in particular as well. In 1983, unemployment for adolescents was at a twenty five year high with only one in ten adolescents employed. The employment rate for African Americans was at 22% (Chang, 2005).

Hip hop responded to the further Reagan-era marginalization with the anthem “The Message.” “The Message” was a song that decried the end results of the community post-deindustrialization, a direct emanation of trickle down economic policies. The song that was
released as a single was counter-instant to the more happy party anthems such as label mates Sugarhill Gang’s *Rappers Delight*. The beat was slow, ominous and forced listeners to hone in on the lyrical content, extracting the song contextually from the less socially critical rap songs that were beginning to get airplay across the country. The lyrics themselves were gritty narratives of hard inner city life exacerbated by the politics of abandonment and systemic disenfranchisement. “And the vibe [of the Message] matched the a rising disgust with Reaganomics, the culmination of fifteen years of benign neglect, and a sense of hopelessness that only seemed to be deepening” (Chang, 2005, p. 179).

The bill collectors they ringing my phone  
Scaring my wife when I’m not at home  
Got a bum education, double digit inflation  
Can’t take the train to the job, there’s a strike at the station  
You’ll grow up in the ghetto living second rate  
And your eyes will sing a song of deep hate  
The places you’re playing, where you stay  
Looks like one great big alleyway  
(Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 1982)

Many within the inner city of the South Bronx and across the country were disenchanted with the legislation of the Reagan era, which cut off funding to urban social programs and essentially castigated labor into positions of powerlessness. These actions allowed an infantile collective movement to develop a voice for its community. Shortly after the release of the Message, many other Reagan era hip hop artists spoke out against the damaging impact that his policies had on the community. Songs such as “The Breaks” by Kurtis Blow and “Tough” and “Hard Times” by Run DMC championed the debilitating war of injustice waged against the urban core and its impecunious masses. In actuality the song “The Breaks”
by Kurtis Blow preceded “The Message,” but *The Message* is considered the Magnum Opus of conscious hip hop. These songs solidified hip hop’s conscious effort to speak as a collective voice for the youth around issues of inadequate jobs and often the lack of representation in various industries. George (1999) expounds on this issue in the book “What the Music Said”:

“Despite recordings like ‘The Message,’ early hip hop recordings rarely ventured beyond themes associated with the everyday experiences of urban based African-American youth. Because on hip hop’s intimate connection to African American youth culture, its narratives usually mirrored whatever concerns were deemed crucial to black youth. ...most early hip hop represented efforts to transcend the dull realities of urban life, including body-numbing experiences within low-wage service industries and inferior and condescending urban school systems.” (p. 140)

Since the Reagan era, hip hop has worked alongside labor for the betterment of its constituencies. When Democratic President Bill Clinton became a proponent of the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) which signified the loss of American jobs to various locales with very few work regulations (lack of fair wage and environmental laws), which forced the realignment of many unions within the American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) (Wypijewski, 2005), hip hop was there. Many hip hop activists took the streets with environmentalists, consumer advocates, labor unions, students, anarchists and pacifists, which resulted in one of the largest youth-led protests in recent history. Over 10,000 protestors converged on the city of Seattle, Washington to allow their voices to be heard between the days of November 27 and December 5, 1999. The protest ended with hundreds of arrests, most of which were confinements with no charges being brought by the city of Seattle. Recently a movie was produced about the said events, which is entitled *Battle in Seattle* (2008), and casted in a lead role is hip hop icon Andre (Andre 300) Benjamin. The connections between
hip hop and labor are further spelled out in the lyrics of Talib Kweli (2007) on the song “Stay Around,” when he raps: “Keeping the verses, deleting the curses, defeating the purpose / When the people go on strike, I'm in the street with the workers.”

Hip Hop Congress continues the tradition of aligning with labor unions with its work with organizations such as S. P. A. N. (Single Payer Action Network of Ohio), Unite Here (Midwest), Opportunities Industrial Center West (OICW) and the California Nurses Association. Hip Hop Congress, in its few years of existence, has unapologetically decided to direct a lot of their community and grassroots efforts with labor. Understandably one of the largest issues facing the advancement of underrepresented in America, Hip Hop Congress has decisively developed relationships with S. P. A. N. and Unite Here. Both organizations champion the rights of workers in Ohio. Both groups seek fundamental healthcare reform for every Ohio resident, resulting in guaranteed full and comprehensive coverage, including services such as hospitalization, prescription coverage, vision and dental, mental care, and long-term care. This fight includes undocumented agricultural workers in the North Western part of the state where many undocumented workers are exploited for labor without benefits or fair labor practices.

The partnership with these organizations was forged prior to the 2007 conference in Athens, Ohio. During the conference, both organizations attended the conference and conducted workshops for the attendees to solidify Congress’ participation in their struggle. Since that conference, local Ohio chapters such as the Athens chapter and the Cincinnati chapter have been instrumental in championing the cause of benefits rights for workers in Ohio. The same can be said of the effort by Hip Hop Congress chapters out west in California
with the California Nurses Association and the Opportunities Industrial Center West (OICW), which are both in California fighting for equal rights for workers.

e. Violence Prevention and Hip Hop Congress

The numbers are staggering when assessing the prevalence of youth violence in contemporary American society. According to the World Report on Violence and Health, World Health Organization (2002), violent U.S. youth homicide rates are more than 10 times that of other leading industrial nations, on par with the rates in developing countries and those experiencing rapid social and economic changes. In addition to this statistic, it is reported that in 2005, 5,686 people ages 10 to 24 were murdered – an average of 16 each day (Youth Violence Facts at a Glance, Summer 2008, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

The youth, in the aforementioned demographic, are 3 times more likely to be victims of violent crime than adults over the age of 24 (Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence, 2000). Further, the Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence (CPYV) reports that gun-related deaths amongst youth in America are two times more probable in the United States than in the industrialized nations of Great Britain and Finland (CYPV, 2000). The sobering reality that one out of every 18 victims of murder in the U.S. is under the age of 18 is only surpassed by the statistic that out of the 18 victims of homicide, one of those deaths is under the age of 12 (CYPV, 2000).

When analyzed from a socio-cultural perspective on adolescent violence in America, an even grimmer picture develops around violent crime in many urban cores. The disparities in
violent crime statistics are astounding when comparing the variance between blacks, whites and Hispanics. The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2000) reports that most youth deaths of Caucasians are a causality of suicide, while conversely most youth deaths amongst Blacks and Hispanics is due to violent crime. Black males and females are 4 to 11 times more likely to be victims of violent crimes than their white counterparts (Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), 2002). Firearms are utilized in the majority of adolescent deaths. Firearms outnumber children in America by 3:1 (CDF, 2002). In 1999, more adolescents died of gun violence than of the culmination of cancer, pneumonia, asthma, influenza and HIV/AIDS.

The outcome of youth violence is daunting. The causality of violence is more ostensible in its ability to surmise a variance of derivations of the pandemic. There are many differing views on who is to blame for the persistent rash of violence perpetrated by youth against other youth. Over the past 55 years, there have been more than 30 congressional hearings on the problem of “youth violence” in America, according to Grier (2001). Most of those hearings have concluded with the usual suspects as the blame. Amongst the list are the media (media violence), commercials (marketing within the entertainment industry) and popular culture, in particular hip hop culture (Pitofsky, 2000). The Commission for the Prevention of Youth Violence (2002) reports that by the age of 18 the average child has witnessed over 16,000 acts of murder and over 200,000 acts of violence. In addition to this fact, the same report reveals that many cartoons geared at children perpetrates about 80 acts of violence per hour and is 50 to 60 times as violent as adult primetime television (Richard & Scott, 2002).
In addition to the media and commercials, music in the form of popular culture and most recently hip hop has shared the blame for adolescent violence. Prior to the advent of hip hop music on the radio, tails of violence, domestic and otherwise, have long since been a fixture on media auxiliaries. “Folk and country music have contained references to murder, killing police, and domestic violence for decades. Yet despite the historical use of violent lyrics, country and folk artists are rarely blamed for escalating murder and domestic violence rates” (Richard & Scott, 2002, p. 182). Heavy metal has also come under scrutiny at times for its content which is often imbued with tales of misogyny and graphic details of gratuitous violence. According to Rose (1991), the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Communication suggested that heavy metal be further analyzed for its supposed correlations to youth violence. Very little has been concluded from this recommendation. However, hip hop has become the face of social ill in particularly for its meteoric assent through popular culture the past three decades (Watkins, 1998). Scholars such as Rose (1991), Dyson (1995), Smitherman (1997) and others defend rap music as a cultural evolution of the black artistic aesthetic, but suggest that rappers and others shoulder a share of the blame for its explicit content, messages and images. Hooks (1994) takes another position by saying there is a significant need to analyze the violence in rap music in dominant white culture as a microcosm of violence within society. Yet to truly understand the origins of violence in hip hop music, it is important to extrapolate its origins from within hip hop’s early days.

It has been a retort of proponents of gangsta rap that rappers just rap about what they see and experience in their songs (Keyes, 2004). Many rappers who come from impoverished environments have used rap music as a voice, out of which they speak on innumerous topics.
Chuck D., the front man of legendary rap group and socially conscious proponents of hip hop, have said that hip hop is CNN for Black people (Mahoney, 2010). Chuck D. has also been a staunch critic of gangsta rap, suggesting that the art of rap should not magnify the negativity in the current, but celebrate the transcendence from that which is negative to positivity. This idea has been the discourse of the two diametrically opposed philosophies of gangsta rap’s true intent and purpose. This debate takes center stage in Rose’s (2008) “Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop and Why It Matters,” where she expounds on the aesthetic of rappers’ glorification of violence in gratuity. The chapter is appropriately entitled: Just Keep it Real.

“Keeping it real is not just about telling one’s truth; it is also about how a ‘keeping it real’ attitude is wedded to a valorization of aggressive and self-destructive actions that have consequences — and how the attitude itself often creates the conditions to which it claims to be responding. The defense that anything rappers rap about is truthful and therefore valuable ‘ghetto’ storytelling has been overused in ways that are destructive not only to hip hop itself but also to black communities and society at large.” (p. 137)

Far too often, the violent imagery which is personified, magnified and championed for capital gain in many rap songs is not only damaging to the community and society as a whole, but oftentimes can be hazardous and fatal to the rapper, which begs the question within hip hop: does life imitate art or does art imitate life?

One of the earliest artists to lose his life due to his glorification of violent imagery in his music was Scott Sterling, also known as D. J. Scott La Rock of the legendary Boogie Down Production (BDP) crew of the Bronx. Ironically enough, Boogie Down Production’s first album is considered by many as the first gangsta rap album, with the album befittingly entitled Criminal
*Minded* (1987). The album was a forerunner to many other odes to calamity and overt physical aggression. In one song KRS ONE raps ferociously, “I’d rather point a pistol at your head and try to burst it.” As one of the first rappers to highly glamorize the gun as a source of unyielding power, KRS ONE pins and records the song “9MM Goes Bang,” a story of a crack dealer who was able to survive shootouts with other crack dealers during deceptive drug transactions. In 1987, this type of violent imagery was rare in hip hop, so much so that the group received major flack for the design of the album cover, which displayed the two (KRS ONE and Scott Scott La Rock Sterling) brandishing firearms on the album cover. This display of violent imagery was the first in hip hop history. The album art became the prototype for gangsta rap albums from that point. The album went on to sell over 700,000 copies with no more than the controversy fueling the sale of the album, also showing that overt negativity sells within the hip hop aesthetic (George, 1998).

The reputation of the group Boogie Down Productions (BDP) as gun-wielding, bloodthirsty agitators not only caught the attention of a burgeoning hip hop consumer market, it locally put neighborhood thugs on notice that the local celebrities from the South Bronx were also a force to be reckoned with. A BDP affiliate Derrick D-NICE Jones got into a minor confrontation with a local drug dealer after pursuing the flirtatious advances of the drug dealer’s girlfriend after a concert at Madison Square Gardens. Scott La Rock, having been a counselor for troubled youths, took the opportunity to play the role of the mediator. Scott, along with Derrick and two others, drove to the drug dealer’s neighborhood seeking a sit down and a peaceful solution to the conflict. Word of the impending meeting reached the dealer and his crew prior to the arrival of Scott La Rock and his message of peace. The neighborhood
dealer and his crew anticipating an altercation lay in wait to ambush the young men. As Scott La Rock pulled up to the curb in search of the dealer, shots rang out. One of the bullets entered the vehicle piercing Scott La Rock, killing him shortly thereafter.

In almost eulogizing fashion, George (1998) laments the senseless death of a great talent who was victimized by the same gratuitous violence which he propagated through his rap group BDP:

“The question of whether BDP’s rep played any part in this preemptive strike will likely never be known, but whenever someone equates rap and gangsterism La Rock’s death comes back to me. Looking back at his shooting, it seems a harbinger of a future where reality and rhyme often would tragically intersect. La Rock was not a violent man. He, in fact, spent much of his life trying to mediate conflicts in shelters where hopelessness ruled. The day he died he was on a peace mission for a friend.” (p.46)

The magnitude of the reality of that day should have served as notice to a young rap industry thirsty for the trappings of fame and fortune, so eager to drink the libation of depravity through tales of gangsterdom. The tragic events of that day came and went and eventually faded into the undercurrent of rap music’s rapid ebb and flow. The violence of that day will come to be replaced by the violent days of many replications of aggressive posturing which will oftentimes lead to hip hop related fights and shoot outs, leaving in its wake an uneasiness that a rap artist had lost his life in the midst of increasing incidents of what at this point is called “rap beef.”

After the death of Scott La Rock and the death of a young man at a hip hop concert in New York, KRS ONE gives up the gangsta rap ethos and decides to use his skills and abilities for the betterment of hip hop and humanity. He became one of the strongest proponents of the
Stop the Violence Movement and gathered the late 80s hip hop elite to record the classic violence prevention opus *Self-Destruction*.

Hip hop has been called a “gladiator sport.” As emcees vie for rap supremacy, the title of King (or Queen) comes with a price. Historically, the “price” has been paid through lyrical combativeness. Many legendary emcees have garnered their status by facing opponents and outlasting the wittiest of punch lines and metaphors. The lyricist that shows his or her mastery of the verbal onslaughts, while withstanding all others, is named King or Queen. This time honored tradition in hip hop is a fundamental element of the culture.

In recent years, as lyrical sparing and emcee conflicts have become of great interest to the public, and an even greater commodity to the labels, verbal sparring has been replaced with piercing commentary and defamation leading to violence. Rappers have become menacing figures on the increasingly harsh and aggressive landscape of hip hop, destined to encounter another more than willing to fatally engage them with little invocation. The images of today’s emcees and rappers are a far cry from the origin of the art of emceeing, and the movement birthed through the verbal craft.

Rap beef has grown more personal as private matters are aired out on albums and discussed on hip hop radio stations, television, and magazines. The difference that should be noted is that at some point there is an increasing interest in hip hop disagreements, but those disagreements were kept “on wax.” Things began to change as gangsta tap became a prevalent genre. As the national focus of rap’s regional dominance shifted from the East Coast to the
West, tensions ran high between prominent artists from New York and Los Angeles (Light, 1999).

A West Coast label, ominously named Death Row Records, under the helm of its menacing leader, Suge Knight, a former gang banger, ruled the rap scene from the early to mid-nineties. With artists such as Dr. Dre, Snoop Doggy Dog and the Dog Pound, Death Row controlled the airwaves for several years. Many New York hip hop radio stations refused to play songs originating in the west, which began rumors of bad blood between the two coasts.

Bad Boy Records, the up and coming impression of Hip Hop Mogul Sean “P. Diddy” Combs, boasted a legendary rapper named Christopher Biggie Smalls Wallace, A.K.A The Notorious B.I.G., from Bedford Stuyverson community of Brooklyn, New York. Many believed that his charisma, style, and lyrical skills would have the capability to bring New York back to prominence. He was proclaimed the King of New York, a title he was very willing to accept. With the East Coast suffering from greatly decreased record sales and unwillingness to give props to the West, and the West willing to take its "propers" by force as necessary, the inevitable happened at the 1995 Source Awards (Chang, 2005).

At the awards, Suge Knight made a comment that was directed at Sean “P. Diddy” Combs. Knight said, “if you don’t want your CEO dancing all in your video, come to Death Row.” This comment was in reference to P. Diddy’s guest appearances in Bad Boy videos. The conflict between the two CEOs heightened when Jake Robles, a personal friend of Suge Knight, was shot to death during a fight at an Atlanta party. Knight blamed Combs for the death and vowed revenge. Simultaneously, Tupac Shakur, an East Coast rap star who was incarcerated at
the time for rape, signed with Suge Knight. When Tupac was released on bail he instantly took up Suge Knight’s beef with Bad Boy. Tupac blamed Sean “P. Diddy” Combs and B.I.G for arranging a hit on him that nearly killed him. P. Diddy and Biggie denied any responsibility or prior knowledge of the incident. Tupac Shakur used his conspiracy theory to fuel his personal attacks on the label. Shakur put out the song “Hit ’Em Up,” which not only threatened the life of Biggie, but the lives of his children as well (Light, 1999).

At that point the beef had spiraled out of control. Reopening the festering wounds of disdain held by both coasts, rappers recorded more and more battle songs to pledge allegiance to their locale. The war of words and sadistic posturing turned violent between the coasts when members of the Dogg Pound, Los Angeles rappers, went to New York to shoot a video for a “dis” record called New York. Their trailer was shot at, but no one was hurt. Invariably this was a message to stay out of New York if you were from the West Coast.

Many know the tragic ending to this story. Both MCs, arguably two of the best in the history of hip hop, lay dead at the end, signifying the inexplicable reality that violence and death have now become juxtaposed with rap music. Both MCs’ posthumous albums went platinum, multiple times, either indicating that consumers missed the artist and wanted to purchase the last renderings by the artists or were infatuated by tragedy and were drawn to the violent endings of those involved in hip hop beef (Light, 1999).

Barrett (1999) suggests that the mass consumption of posthumous albums upon the death of both artists is no mistake. In the article “Dead Men Printed: Tupac Shakur, Biggie Small, and Hip Hop Eulogy,” Barrett surmises that the dead black body is a commodity because
of the buying power of suburban whites and their need to fantasize about the dangers and perceived inherent violence of inner city black males. This commodified fantasy world, exploited by suburban white males at the expense of urban blacks, serves as a delicate tension between the economy of culture as a commodity and commodity as a culture. The article elaborates on the relationship between death (in particular black death) and the white consumer who is eagerly awaiting the next product of death through hip hop culture. Conversely, it is noted that on the other end of the spectrum, poor blacks from the inner city are anxiously awaiting their chance to become the next big product even if it means death.

Recently, there have been innumeros artists who have decided to invariably trade in their own sense of well-being and safety for the potentiality of fame that comes with gangsta rap music. When thinking of this rap dynamic, one artist befits the standard profile of the aforementioned rap star; that rap star is the man known as Curtis 50 Cents Jackson. Artists like 50 Cent gained fame by challenging, on record and in person, some of the top rappers. He aggressively went after anyone that would make a name for him. Understanding that the consequences of his actions could be fatal, he entitled his first album “Get Rich or Die Trying.” On the album cover, 50 Cent, the recipient of multiple gunshot wounds which nearly ended his life, is pictured with a massive bullet hole through his torso. He has come to epitomize the new antagonism of today’s rapper.

Before 50 Cent signed a very lucrative record contract with Aftermath Records, he created street buzz for himself with a song entitled “How to Rob an Industry N*gga.” In the song 50 Cent threatened to enact violence on anyone he feels is accessible prey, which will
keep money in his pocket. The culmination of his violent past, high profile altercations with Ja Rule, a fellow Queens rapper, and his menacing presence, propelled 50 Cent from street legend to rap’s biggest commodity. Today, 50 Cent is one of the top rappers and is now the target for verbal and physical onslaughts of other rappers who have acculturated ferocity as a means of succeeding in the industry, just as he had done several years prior. In the song “Heat” from the album “Get Rich or Die Trying”, 50 Cent (2003) exposes the daily danger that he has grown accustomed to living with due to the hazards associated with being a rapper in the current state of rap music. At the end of the song he says,

Yeh... haha
Ay Dre!
You got me feelin' real bullet proof up in this muthafucka
Cuz the windows on my muthafuckin' Benz is bullet proof nigga
Cuz my muthafuckin' vest is bullet proof nigga
Cuz my muthafuckin' hat is bullet proof nigga
But the Doc said if I get hit I might get a fuckin' concussion
Better that than a hole in the head right nigga?
hahahaha

50 Cent’s statements encapsulate the decadent state of the art form. From its humble beginnings, hip hop has always valued competition as a quintessential element of the culture. However, the infusion of capital along with a heightened sense of institutionalized aggression has created the current state wherein competition and violence become part of the rapper’s persona.

In 50 Cent’s (2005) semi-autobiographical book “From Pieces to Weight,” he tells of his rise through the streets of Jamaica Queens, New York as a stick up kid turned drug dealer
turned rapper. Throughout the book he constantly equates the rap music industry to the crack cocaine street industry. His appetite for the drug trade was only satisfied by his new obsession, which is the music industry. Although it is favorable to transcend the seedy back alley drug transactions for a more “respectable” vocation, 50 Cent did not see the music industry as a way to simply provide income through creative measures. He used the same aggressively violent tactics that he had utilized on the streets to an industry thirsty for the next violent spectacle willing to go to any violent length to maintain his fan base.

The aggressive, menacing figures manufactured by the industry threaten the viability of the future of rap music. At its base, it appears that this shift has created a situation in which the form of the rapper is more important than the talent or quality. This is clearly not congruent with the foundation of hip hop where antagonism is an end, not a means. When rappers lose their human form by building their image around conflict, they become more estranged from themselves, their families, their communities, and ultimately, their work.

While competition has been viciously argued as a means to enhance the exchange of ideas and techniques, cooperation is often overlooked. Trust, as a main factor of cooperation, remains an essential part of the evolution of all exchanges, including those in the rap industry. At this time, most major labels are owned by a small number of large, multi-national corporations who essentially sacrifice their laborers, or rappers, in order to gain profit. Clearly, rappers are reduced to monetary value, and the more they make, the more expendable they become to the large corporations.
The relationship between the structure and form of the rap industry reveals the weaknesses within the competitive orientation of hip hop artists. Structurally, a small number of hip hop artists gain notoriety throughout American culture. “Gangster rap,” “Thug Life,” and antagonistic characters (such as 50 Cent) are highly profitable in no small part to the large number of suburban Caucasian purchasers (Chang, 2005; Neale, 1997; Warner, 1998). Record labels are keenly aware of their market’s perception of African Americans, especially males, and they exploit this by creating the perception that it is part of the rapper’s nature to be violent.

Violence prevention is very important in relation to hip hop culture (Dyson, 2005). Many studies have shown that adolescents’ self-image and identity are closely associated with the messages and images in hip hop culture (Whites & Cone, 1999; West, 2008; West, 2004). Due to often negative portrayals of urban adolescents in the media, it is important to utilize hip hop to counteract the perpetuation of violence in urban communities. In addition, adolescents in cognate peer groups use music as a way to negotiate interpersonal relationships in terms of expressing, identifying and articulating similar emotions (Epstein, 1994). The consumption of popular culture, without a lens in which to parse out many negative images, renders adolescents subjugated to the acculturation of those images (Dolby, 2003). Beachum and Mc Cray (2011) posit that “students who develop a strong value system have less chance of being adversely affected by negative images in hip hop culture (including violence) and misrepresentations in television media, and more of a chance to be influenced by the ‘positivity’ exemplified in a healthy school” (p. 40). Violence prevention has the ability to be enhanced when paired up hip hop culture.
In the article “Slam: Hip Hop Meets Poetry – A Strategy for Violence Intervention,” Bruce and Davis (2000) suggest that equipping students with the ability to creatively and effectively communicate such emotions as disappointment, feelings of marginalization and anger through hip hop-inspired methods such as poetry slamming will considerably aid in eradicating youth violence. Many outside of hip hop culture may not be familiar with this form of artistic presentation. According to Bruce and Davis (2000), “slamming provides access to poetry for those who believe poems are impenetrable. Slam also gives students an outlet for the words, ideas and sounds that circle inside them” (p. 123). In this instance, slamming becomes a vital tool in the fight against social conditions which lead to violence in many lower economic environments coping with despair and marginalization. The article goes on to also suggest that “the development of inclusive curriculum and creating conditions within the classroom which encourages students to use the power of language instead of the force of fist can symbolically intervene in violence, and in order to do so, more humanizing pedagogy along with multiple method strategies is needed” (p. 121). Many non-violent strategies are employed outside of poetry slam to address social and emotional needs desired by youth through many programs that are implemented through non-violence work conducted by members of Hip Hop Congress. For example, Hip Hop Congress partners with affiliates such as Communities Against Hate in Western Massachusetts, The Hip Hop Chess Federation in the Bay Area of San Francisco and Oakland, California, S.A.V.O.Y. (Stop All Violence On Youth) also established in the Oakland area, The Baltimore Urban Debate League, Seattle Urban Debate Foundation, and Unity Care, a community based non-profit youth development agency. All of the youth-centered
organizations work in various capacities to ensure the safety and well-being of young adults affected by structural violence and thought to be at risk because of environmental factors.

Communities Against Hate (CAH) was founded by Maurice “Soul Fighter” Taylor, then the president of the African American Cultural Society at Springfield Community College and also a member of the hip hop collective DarkSouls. CAH was created to be a place where the community can come and discuss anything that hurts, disappoints, frustrates and otherwise oppresses. The catch is that once the discussion begins communally, all are required to help solve the problem. This non-violent form of expression aids in the mechanics of disclosure and secondly invites others to collectively empower one another to come up with solutions to that which oppresses. In the same manner as Communities Against Hate, the S.A.V.O.Y. (Stop All Violence On Youth) stands in as a mediatory tool in helping young people work through feelings that often push youth to violence. In addition, the group works on life skill centered courses that address bullying and school violence in a method that considers the well-being and safety of the child. Unity Cares shares in the mission of addressing the needs of the student from a non-violent perspective in tandem with the other programs previously mentioned.

The method of defusing emotions of anger experienced by youth is only one aspect of violence prevention from a hip hop model. Another aspect which is replacing previous activities that may have lent themselves to the growth and development of violent tendencies is programming that will provide young people with skills that redress aggressive and negative behavior. Two programs in particular assist in developing skills that will aid in healthy
competition and self-esteem building: The Hip Hop Chess Federation program and The Hip Hop Debate Team out of Baltimore.

The Hip Hop Chess Federation (HHCF) was founded by award-winning lecturer and author, Adisa Banjoko. The HHCF is dedicated to providing an inclusive setting for individuals to interact, play and develop life strategy skills with people they perceive as mentors. The HHCF has been touted as a “Bully Proof Strategy” (Colletts, 2011) and has had an article in the New York Times (2007) for its innovative measures of teaching non-violence and replacing aggression with strategy.

“Despite the school system’s best efforts and intentions, and the efforts of overworked parents, the past generations have suffered from lack of suitable education and essential resources required for a successful life,’ states co-founder Adisa Banjoko. ‘We recognize that chess, martial arts and hip hop unify people from multiple cultural, religious and social backgrounds. These black and white squares do not care what color you are or if you are rich or poor. The only thing they ask is that you come with your strategy, your patience and your skills...’” (http://www.hiphopchessfederation.org)

The HHCF also does an annual tournament which attracts the likes of hip hop legends such as the Wu Tang Clan, giving away thousands of dollars. Since 2007, the educational scholarship awards have reached over $10,000.

In the same way slam becomes a conduit for the rechanneling of anger and misguided emotion and hip hop chess acts as strategies for non-violence, hip hop debate embodies both elements in changing the lives of young people seeking new ways of redirection and creative outlets of discovery. Two hip hop debate teams which have received national attention recently are the Baltimore Urban Debate League and Seattle Debate. Both programs utilize the
art of strategy in debating issues germane to their own conditions in their neighborhoods, debunking the myth that young people cannot articulate that which oppresses them and speak truth to solutions for themselves and their community. Hip Hop Congress actively engages these programs as well as champions the cause of affiliates for the betterment of youth across the country anywhere there is a need.

C. Hip Hop Pedagogical Development

“Hip Hop Congress, as a national and international organization that is dedicated to its mission, is constantly looking to develop and work with those developing experimental and pedagogically proven methods of using Hip Hop as a positive motivational and academic tool. That’s why HHC has picked up Education as an initiative and centralization point for its artists, chapters, partners and donors.” (AOCS Marketplace, 2011)

Hip Hop Congress’ interaction with hip hop education begins with the fortuitous beginnings of the organization. One of the two founders of HHC was an education major and now works in one of the lowest performing schools in the state of Louisiana as a principal. The other two founders worked in the inner city of San Jose as community counselors. It is intuitive that the organization would reflect the values, interests and aims of its founders. According to Ron Gubitz, several of the original chapter members were all Teach For America participants (2012).

“Teach For America, for those unfamiliar with it, places recent college graduates, who go through the program's training, in disadvantaged urban and rural schools around the country. Teachers agree to work in those schools for two years. That process stands in contrast to traditional teacher-prep models, in which aspiring educators go through education programs on university campuses.” (Cavanaugh, 2011)
This small group of community activists and educators came together to form a platform which will become the foreground for Hip Hop Congress’ educational initiative. An educational initiative which started with the original hip hop congress website, through the inception of a national educational platform utilizing the Urban Teacher Network, has helped to influence the direction of hip hop education in America.

After researching the organization from a programmatic and philosophy-driven perspective, it is academic (no pun intended) to assume that the organization would lean heavily on and towards educational and more specifically hip hop educational initiatives. There are four reasons that educational initiatives perfectly complement Hip Hop Congress as a programmatic platform and an organizational direction: 1) The educational foundation set forth by founders and early members, 2) the necessity for the aesthetics of hip hop to be taught, 3) the growth of hip hop pedagogy during the early years of HHC, and 4) the expansion of HHC chapters on high school and college campuses. Each development frames the discussion of how this organization has contributed to the development of hip hop pedagogy on a local and national level.

The growth and development of hip hop congress would potentially not have been established in the same manner if it had not been for the community focus of the original members of the group. As two of the members worked in Menlo Park, a southern California community center in the capacity of community outreach and development directors, the other two University of Southern California students sought to connect hip hop activist from all walks
of life through their website hiphopcongress.com. Eventually, one of them will leave his sophomore year and move to the Midwest.

“Ron took Hip Hop Congress with him and started the second chapter at Blooming. ‘Knowledge of Self’ by Black Star is the song that was playing nonstop in my mind and CD player in 2000 when I started HHC, and then transferred to IU. I think it encapsulates a lot of what I believe. Also the lyrics from Kweli’s song Eternalist: ‘That’s why I got love in the face of hate’ and, if one of us ain’t free, then we all to blame.” (Hatch & McQuillen, 2006).

Once in the Midwest, Ron Gubitz spread the word about Hip Hop Congress and created a faithful following of students invested in activism through hip hop. It was during this time that Gubitz felt as if he needed to do more to change society. One day on campus he came across a sign that read “You want to change things?” – it was at that moment that his life changed and he merged education with hip hop.

“Teach For America is the national corps of outstanding recent college graduates of all academic majors who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools, and become lifelong leaders in the effort to expand educational opportunity. Ron did some further research and the mission of TFA was similar to that of HHC. He saw a good fit and applied to become a teacher.” (Hatch & McQuillen, 2006)

Gubitz will go on to teach at an inner city school of 1400 students. The school is riddled with violence, even in the midst of security guards and metal detectors at every entrance and exit. Academically, the school is the worst in the state. The state proficiency designates five tiers in which all high schools in the state fall. Tier 1 is substantially behind state standard, Tier 2 is progressing, 3 is nearing proficient, 4 is proficient and 5 is advanced; the school Ron teaches in is tiered at 0. 0 is labeled below substantially behind (Hatch & McQuillen, 2006). Gubitz is beloved by his students and helps the school pull to tier 2 through hip hop literacy lessons.
Currently he is a principal in a southern high school which ranks lowest in proficiency in the state. He is energized and excited about the possibility of “changing things.”

Since leaving Indiana University and infusing the environment with hip hop activist sentiment, the community continues to thrive, utilizing hip hop to be a voice in a place not known for hip hop. His influence on the location has not only led to the replication of positive hip hop programming and engagement, but his influence has led others to education by way of Teach For America.

“On my way to math class I saw a flyer for the Hip Hop Congress, which at the time, was just forming on the campus of Indiana University. I skipped my math class that day, and made a decision that has played a prominent role in the direction of my life. I can’t say with 100% certainty that without Hip Hop Congress, I may never have become a DJ, or Hip Hop journalist. But I can say that without Hip Hop Congress I would have not have become a student leader at I, a corps member of Teach For America, or gained the cultural and historical understanding of hip hop and its community.” (Sean CK, 2008)

Gubitz, who credits both John Dewey and Cornel West for his inspiration as an educator, continues to be an example of dedication in the midst of opposition. In this instance, opposition comes in the way of miseducation and a lack of resources within the schools he has chosen to serve in. The stories of the founders and early chapter members are a collection of individuals who came together to affect change in their communities, leveraging hip hop as the medium in which to seek justice and betterment for inner city youth.

Shamako Noble, a native of San Jose, California and one of the founders and president emeritus of Hip Hop Congress, is an activist, organizer and a long-time proponent of incorporating hip hop into the traditional canon. As an accomplished battle rapper and winner of the first battle Ave. hip hop night, Noble is also a renowned emcee. In 2004, he released his
first solo album “The Return of the Coming of the Aftermath.” It is his role as an emcee which facilitated the meeting between him, his partner and other co-founder Reali Robinson and the two college students at University of Southern California. “Shamako helped co-found the Congress, along with Reali Robinson, and ran the San Francisco Bay area chapter for several years until the organization merged with a student-organization of the same name” (Free Press, 2012). Believing that hip hop was becoming too commercial and that gangsta rap had replaced conscious hip hop as a national platform for the culture, Noble and Robinson decided to create an artist development initiative in the Bay Area, a place known for its local tales of drug dealing and pimping. The inception of this artist initiative was revolutionary in its design, because it challenged the standard of lyricism and offered an alternative message and direction as an artist. “The Artist Program provides the classes, resources, and mentoring necessary for artists to sculpt their careers and connects artists to opportunities by which they can further hone their skills and gain exposure” (Macy 2007, p.1).

Noble and Robinson ran the artist development organization between 1993 until 2000 when the two joined forces with their namesake from University of Southern California. The two mentored many groups during that period, creating opportunities for artists who presented an atypical message to book shows in the Bay Area and other locations in central and southern California. The artist collective set out to directly challenge the pervasive rap scene, consisting of drug references, hyper-misogynistic imagery and violent lyricism, one booked show and emcee lesson at a time. It was his interaction with the newly consolidated Hip Hop Congress that heightened another dimension of his activism: hip hop pedagogy.
“With over 9 years of industry experience and 14 years of community organizational experience, Shamako understands the value of hard work and importance of building quality relationships in the industry and culture. For the past 5 years Shamako has worked closely with both high school and college organizations to bring quality Hip Hop educational programming.” (www.speakersforanewamerica.com)

Shamako, also known as the “Kevin Bacon of South Bay Hip Hop,” in 2003 is named the second president of Hip Hop Congress, subsequent to being named chair of the newly integrated artist initiative. He leverages this position to collaborate and ally with many other organizations to both strengthen community service efforts but also to edify the hip hop activist community. His leadership has resulted in national prominence and partnerships with the likes of multiple hip hop and community activist organizations dedicated to the cause of inner-city youth empowerment. Noble expounds on the success of partnerships: “We’ve had great success in working with practically every national hip hop organization in the country, along with a whole host of local partners. Some of these partners include the National Hip Hop Political Convention, Hip Hop Caucus, Hip Hop Association (H2A), and the Universal Zulu Nation” (Macy 2007, p. 2). These partnerships have been vital in igniting the quest of new methodologies that will help to shape the trajectory of hip hop education. Shamako not only assumed leadership within HHC, but took an active role in Hip Hop Association as the Director of Education. Hip Hop Association created and published the *Hip Hop Educational Reader Vol 1.* (Runell & Diaz, 2007). This book is one of the first attempts to define and holistically approach hip hop education. Additionally, Shamako has written for many different websites and magazines on every subject from politics to hip hop education. In 2001, he became the co-
editor of H2O: *Hip Hop Observer*, a since defunct monthly on-line journal on hip hop culture and activism.

There are many stories that can and should be told of the educational endeavors and accomplishments of the founders and early members of this unrecognized revolutionary collective. The pervasive belief that both hip hop should and can be utilized as a pedagogical tool and that hip hop’s image and focus in popular culture is misleading and detrimental to the young and impressionable of this generation is a driving and overarching force which facilitates the educational endeavors. It is fair to assume that beyond enlisting hip hop pedagogical tactics to enhance standardized education, there is a measure of teaching that must take place in order to inform an audience of the mere foundations of hip hop. What is hip hop? How do you define hip hop? What are the elements of hip hop? These are questions that members of HHC answer every day for countless adolescents who grow up influenced by hip hop culture, with often times very little knowledge of its beginnings, its empowering aspects and furthermore its ability to create positive changes in individuals and the communities from which they come. In order to convey even the basics, a measure of education is required, which makes every Hip Hop Congress member who engages in expanding ones knowledge of hip hop a teacher of sorts.

According to Macy (2007), HHC chapters and members produce and sponsor more than 200 events a year. Many of the events include Emceeing/B-boying/Djing/ Graffiti exhibitions, battles, panel discussions, speeches, movie screenings and annual hip hop awareness weeks. All of the events mentioned are tools of engaging and relaying information which expands the knowledge and redefines previously held ideas and beliefs, all resulting in a scaffolding effect.
leading to cognitive development learning. In essence, all programming becomes a tool of education, even in an effort to purely program around the aesthetics of the hip hop elements. Giroux (2004) would define Hip Hop Congress’ programmatic efforts as “Public Pedagogy.” Public Pedagogy is defined as, learning and educating beyond the classroom.

The four elements (Emceeing, B-boying, DJing and Graffit) are taught as the aesthetics of hip hop culture (Chang, 2005; Rose, 1994; Light, 2005). However, the fifth element that Afrika Bambaata and the other Forefathers instilled into the culture, existing as possibly the most important element, is Knowledge. Knowledge can be considered as the glue that holds all the other four elements together. It is this knowledge that definitely parses out hip hop culture and community from any other likeness.

“Without knowledge, a person who can rap will never be an emcee. A person who can mix records on a turntable can never be considered a DJ if he or she doesn’t have knowledge. Spinning on your head without possessing knowledge only makes you capable of getting dizzy. Tagging the walls without knowledge is just vandalism. Knowledge is the element that explains the difference between mainstream society and the hip hop community.” (Watson, 2010)

Hip Hop Congress acknowledges the importance of displaying the elements in their purest forms in order to educate. These programs, when divided from the intentional hip hop pedagogical efforts of HHC, are still a tool of learning. To this end, every effort leveraged by individuals or chapters to spread the knowledge of hip hop in its myriad of dimensions must realize their importance to HHC’s educational initiatives and further its importance in defining hip hop education and the very community it serves. Diaz (2012) sums it up in this manner:

“The fifth element, as an education-centered and self-reflective tool, offers hope, instills agency, and widens world perspective. Hip-Hop elements provide significant life and career building skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, self-awareness, time
management, and teamwork. Whether in the classroom, gymnasium, recreation center, park, or at home, Hip Hop culture is ubiquitous and locally accessible to youth culture.” (p. 2)

Another aspect that speaks to the importance and significance of Hip Hop Congress’ educational contribution to hip hop pedagogy has to do with the timing of the inception and growth of HHC and the simultaneous inception and growth of the formation of hip hop pedagogy. According to Diaz (2012), Hip Hop made in-roads into academia in the fall of 1990, when April Silver, Ras Baraka, and Matt Middleton and students founded the first Hip Hop Conference at Howard University in Washington, DC. Nearly four years, later Patricia Rose wrote the germinal work *Black Noise: Rap Music nd Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Since the triumphant release of that book, there are over “300 books, dissertations, Journal articles, Master’s thesis and other publications on hip hop culture” (p. 4). Within three years of the release of Rose’s book, Reali Robinson started the artist project in San Jose to essentially implement the same endorsing and promoting of hip hop culture as an alternative to the onslaught of ramped misogyny, violence and gangsterdom that swept on to the radio and into popular culture in the early to mid-nineties.

There is no evidence to suggest that the USC or the San Jose/San Fransico chapters (the first chapters) were directly influenced by the work of Rose (1994) or the first Hip Hop conference in Washington, D.C. at Howard University, but their efforts were closely aligned with promoting the positive and creative aspects of hip hop culture as a means of empowering.

“Hip hop began as a cultural movement among black youths in the 1970s to highlight social problems in urban New York. But now, hip hop is identified mainly in commercial rapping that exploits stereotypes of violence and misogyny, Berkowitz said. The USC
chapter hopes that its new programs this semester will help change these
generalizations.” (Samuelson, 2005)

The chapter started modestly enough, with its first few semesters consisting of planning
sessions, there were very few programs or chances to promote the organization and increase
its 20 person membership. To complicate the process of progression and promotion, both
Bromley and Berkowitz left USC at the end of that year. Berkowitz transferred to Indiana and
Bromley graduated. Jamaal Rahman, an ambitious junior, took over as chapter president and
assessed the organization in 2004. “Meetings have always been a struggle,” Rahman exclaims.
“If it were a workshop though, like a lesson in breakdancing, more people would show up.”
(Franklin, 2005). He and the rest of the group of HHC members decided to bring the culture to
the people. Hip Hop Congress began a tradition on USC’s campus that is a calling card of most
collegiate Hip Hop Congress chapters, and that tradition is called the public cypher. A cypher is
a term that refers to a circle of rappers who extemporaneously say rhymes acapella or to a beat
generated by someone in the group. Most times, the cypher is to display the lyrical skills of
those within the group, but it also serves as a way of attracting an audience and also developing
a following and new membership. This signature of HHCs all across the country and abroad can
be essentially traced back to the Tommy Trojan statue at USC when the original chapter
instituted weekly cyphers, intended to gain notoriety on a campus full of greek-life, athletics
and other more established student organizations.

“The cypher is one of the most basic parts of hip hop culture,” Jamaal says, “and it is the
easiest way for Hip Hop Congress to maintain a consistent presence on campus. There
is not much planning involved, anyone can come out and join, and it not only helps
already skilled emcees with their talents, but it can educate people who really have no
idea what a cypher is or its importance to hip hop.” (Franklin, 2005)
The USC chapter continued to grow along with many other collegiate chapters such as the University of California Irvine campus, the University of Colorado Boulder campus and the Indiana University Bloomington campus, just to name a very few. As the existing chapter’s programming became more detailed and they began to bring in powerful speakers, many of the chapters began to develop philosophies which consciously pushed them towards theoretical frameworks and closer to marrying education with hip hop. This concept was already existent, but being exposed to speakers such as Kris “KRS ONE” Parker, the self-proclaimed embodiment of hip hop culture whose name means “Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone,” began the process of pedagogical incorporation into their programming at the University of California Irvine campus.

“The social consciousness for which KRS ONE is famous made its way into his lecture, making it apparent to everyone just how powerful his philosophies and musings on the world are... He weaved his own philosophies and words of wisdom for UC Irvine students into each of his lessons, and commented on the efforts of people to bring about change. ‘We keep thinking our struggle is only seen by us. Anything you do is seen by the whole world. Somebody is looking and judging your actions.’ KRS-ONE said.” (Zafar, 2006)

His words and influence on adjoining hip hop culture with theory played a profound role on the platforms going forward for the burgeoning group.

Another artist and proponent of education, Saul Williams, attended and lectured a Hip Hop Awareness week at Indiana University in 2006. His words further spurred students to grasp the possibility of couching much of their activism in an educational platform. Saul Williams, a renowned poet, lecturer and author of three books on hip hop culture and poetry,
one of his latest entitled *The Dead Emcee Scrolls: The lost teachings of Hip Hop* (2007), will guide some congress members to reflect on the hip hop education movement and aspire to create educational inroads through their hip hop activism. “Saul Williams has pretty strong convictions and is looking to make a change with his poetry and to affect people and the way they see things,” said graduate student Steve Backhus, a Hip Hop Congress member (Oloffson, 2006). The culmination of the advent of many hip hop scholars who are now producing literary works on hip hop education at proliferated rates and the teachings and philosophies of KRS ONE, Saul Williams and other renown voices within hip hop both acted as the seeds of consciousness to engage in a format for hip hop education. During the 2006 Boulder Colorado national conference, the organization announced their hip hop education national initiative:

“This year’s national conference will help in developing a national service infrastructure for HHC with variety of different student groups, artist and partners. This means working with more students, more artists and more communities. Workshops will include interactive discussions on Health Care, International Hip Hop, Hip Hop Education, the future of the element of emceeing, Youth Violence and much more.” (PRWEB, 2006)

There are at least three different estimations as to the most accurate number of viable HHC chapters. When asked about the count of chapters, Dr. Wright, a National Advisory Board Member and creator of the Urban Teachers Network, estimated between 35 and 50 chapters (Wright, 2011). Ron Gubitz admits to having no idea (2011) and Shamako Noble estimated between 40 and 45 chapters (2011). The website states that there are “over 30 chapters,” but the actual count is 55 listed. One may figure that this is fairly peculiar for the heads of a national organization to have such ambiguity around its membership and body. The great flux accounts for the loose affiliations and lack of centralization between the chapters and the
national office. The phrase “you don’t join us, we join you” speaks volumes as to the intent in not corralling the various organizations through centralization. Many of the national board members appear to value localization, in terms of programming and governance. This can potentially cause problems with communication and other issues around collective cohesion and intra-group logistics. Below are the criteria for starting a chapter:

Want to Start a Chapter?
If you are interested in creating a chapter there is a simple process and criteria to follow. First and foremost we want to stress a few things:

1. You know your local community better than we do, therefore much of the criteria can be adjusted to fit your chapter and situation. We are not trying to put up barriers, we are trying to include as many interested parties as possible. Society works better with compromise and understanding, Hip Hop Congress is no different.

2. Starting a chapter takes commitment and an open mind with meetings, networking with the local artists, administrators, politicians, and more. Also you have to have daily contact with your email.

3. If you are a part of a similar organization or know of a similar one in your community, lets connect! We have an extensive list of partners and affiliates that we work with constantly. Also there are several instances where local programs have become recognized chapters over time. If you and your organization have questions about the pros and cons of affiliate vs. chapter status please email suriah@hiphopcongress.com with “Hip Hop Congress inquiry” in the subject.

Still interested? GREAT! The first step all potential chapters must do is write an email to tina@hiphopcongress.com explaining why you would like to start a chapter, give some background on your community and situation, and tell how a chapter would help you and your community. A simple 3 paragraph email is fine. Please put “New Hip Hop Congress Chapter” in the subject. After reviewing your email we will contact you and go from there. Different chapters go through different processes depending if they are high school based, college based, or community based. If you have questions please email Tiffany Suriah Harmon, at suriah@hiphopcongress.com and put “New Hip Hop Congress Chapter” in the subject. (www.hiphopcongress.com)

Recently, HHC conducted an audit of chapters to ascertain the number of active chapters. The websites estimate of over 30 is essentially the most accurate. The format for assembly under the banner of HHC may pose issues of holding chapters accountable for
productivity and activity, but the structure of designating various classifications to chapters works to service innumerable constituents through classifications.

Hip Hop Congress’ chapter format is divided into three categories: Community Chapters, College Chapters and High School Chapters. All three types of chapters conduct educational programs. All three implement various modes of educational promotion. However, in most instances it is the collegiate chapter that often will advance hip hop pedagogic efforts, because of theories often tested through programming on the collegiate level. This statement is in no way to lessen the efforts of any chapter. Many of the most viable chapters conduct programming around the aesthetics of hip hop culture (Emceeing, DJing, B-boying/B-girling and graffiti), but may not always move beyond public pedagogy within the program or lesson.

When asking various board members about chapters that are functioning at a competent rate, defined as consistent programming that is engaging and progressive, stable leadership, in good standing with nationals and compliant with paper work, many chapters were mentioned, but one chapter was stated more than any other. The Auburn Community chapter of Auburn, California has exemplified itself as one of many model chapters. The Auburn chapter actively engages the community with a series of programs that are not only a benefit to the community, but a benefit to the youth. Some of the grassroots programs implemented by HHC Auburn are:

- Urban Arts Workshop Series
- Writing and Reciting ~ Healing Through Written and Spoken Word
- Auburn Hip Hop Congress Ambassador Training
➢ Artist Development

➢ Community Service Projects

➢ Quality Events: Festivals, Concerts, Trainings, Workshops

➢ Awareness

These programs which are designed around youth primarily 14-25 and community members of all ages, are created by the chapter head Natalie Pohley, research and input coordinators Tara Buckley, Rocky Zapata, Sharlee Andrews, Annalisa Linderholm, Emily Wisber and Tammy Cherry, research and advice coordinators Christina Nicholson, Lindsay Porta, and Project Support Norma Burch, Angela Tahtu and Kara Sutter. This small but effective group of volunteers and individual supporters came together and put together a series of programs that exceed the expectation of anyone cognizant of the time and talent it takes to put together this quality of programming. In addition to the exorbitant amount of time associated, the program has to secure funds from local partners.

Three participating organizations that assisted with the aforementioned programs implemented by HHC Auburn are Placer Arts 360, Golden Sierra Workforce Investment Board and Placer County Youth Commission. HHC Auburn has also received support from the local Arts Council who donated space for an office and also acts as our Fiscal Agent, and also supports their Artist Development, by allowing them to curate graffiti art shows. The local library donated space for writing classes and other community events and provided snacks. The Placer County parks and recreation and fairgrounds lent space for Urban Art Workshops and annual festivals, inclusive of food and performance stage. Just as remarkable as the
services provided is the fact that the chapter is still in its infancy in comparison to many neighboring California chapters. Pohley explains:

“I was working at Peer Court, where I coordinated community service programs and positive activities for juveniles. During my work there I was able to research programs and at the time I was very interested in incorporating hip hop into the classroom. I stumbled across hip hop congress. I thought it sounded cool but it didn’t seem like there was one close to me (it wasn’t listed on the website). Then when planning a hip hop festival for the teens in my area, I realized there was a Sacramento Chapter, 45 miles from Auburn. As you can imagine, I was excited and they got involved in the festival.” (2012)

More often than not, chapters are formed by local interactions between hip hop enthusiasts who want to get involved with an organization that focuses on community engagement through hip hop. Many chapters who are close in proximity join HHC through programming, interpersonal relationships or a member moving from one chapter and founding a new one in his or her new surroundings. In the case of the Auburn chapter, Pohley and supporters had an ambitious agenda and collaborated with a local chapter for provision and support in implementation. The rest of the story of success lies in the planning and direction provided by the staff of the Auburn chapter.

“I worked with Sacramento for 2 years, specifically with Greg Pruitt, developing a hip hop after school program for Natomas High School. The program started off with a bang but bureaucracy intervened and they wouldn’t allow students to go if their GPA was low. We decided to pull out. I continued to work with Sacramento on their Hip Hop Awareness Festival and was bringing cars full of people from Auburn to volunteer and participate. Realizing, that we had a local draw, we started our own chapter in a very white conservative town. We introduced hip hop to our town with a ‘What is Hip Hop Forum’ to 70 people at a Beach Hut Deli. We had great support from the Sacramento Chapter and Artists and still worked with them while creating our own chapter.” (Pohley, 2012).
Through this process of collaboration, chapters are able to help new and inexperienced chapters gain footing in creating sustaining programs and imbuing fundamental principles of HHC, even though it has been discovered that there is confusion and even ambiguity about the functioning of the leadership of the organization. Pohley (2012), in addition to praising the independence each chapter has, states: “I feel like each chapter has the freedom to design their HHC as they wish. That is a beautiful thing. We have freedom to determine what to focus on” (2012). She goes on to lament the lack of cohesiveness between the executive board and the individual chapters: “I can only really speak locally. I think there is a need for better communication with the National Organization’s goals and activities” (2012). The duality of valuing autonomy, yet desiring more leadership from Nationals, continues to be an issue that executive board of HHC will have to address in order to maintain chapter continuity and to avoid chapter destabilization. The Auburn chapter may provide some answers around issues of process and best chapter practice. Their model has proven successful and may be shown to potentially play a role in executive board suggestions for effective structural and programmatic execution.

“We also have 5 Auburn Hip Hop Congress Advisors and 40 ambassadors. Advisors are in leadership positions and lead programs. Ambassadors complete a 2-day leadership training on teamwork and goals of HHC. Unfortunately, I don’t know what the Leadership Council is. I am very confused by the National structure. I have mostly enjoyed advice and counsel from Sarah Harris though. And I am hoping to do some work with Rahman.” (Pohley, 2012)

The detailed structure of these programs appear to seamlessly facilitate the utility of hip hop pedagogy, in the fact that their programming engages the adolescents culture and teaches them to view the world from newly developed perspectives based on the scaffolding provided
by programs such as the urban arts program and the writing and literacy programs. Natalie Pohley and her chapter understand the impact of what they provide for young people thirsty for what liberatory education can offer through hip hop.

“Due to self-evaluations and writing about and reporting our successful practices, we have received several grants, grant supplements, donations and community support. We are often used as a model program for other organizations. Hip Hop Pedagogy has been an effective tool in reaching youth artistically and creatively... There is much to learn when culture is involved. Through these programs people are introduced to the depths of hip hop beyond all stereotypes and mainstream representation. It has made us become very aware of our community and responsible for educating on representing this culture in the best light possible.” (Pohley, 2012)
CHAPTER 6

SOCIAL NETWORK ACTIVISM AND THE URBAN TEACHERS NETWORK

“We are a new generation of people rising in the world. We are strong people with powerful ideas. The Hip Hop Congress gives you a place to do something with your ideas. The Hip Hop Congress is based upon the belief that the Internet is an aspect of technology that has and will continue to unite our world and bring it to a higher understanding, to a general social enlightenment. But it cannot happen unless we begin the process.” (web.archive.org, 2001)

These words were posted on the original Hip Hop Congress site erected as the meritorious lynchpin to a movement, predictively attracting all walks of life, class, ethnicity and occupation, all under the name of hip hop and activism. All channeled through the idea of utilizing technology to first attract, next to inform, then to mobilize, but all for change - all through a forethought of a concept that did not have a widely recognized name or utility, “Social Media.” Ron Gubitz and Jordan Bromley, two University of Southern California students who, after an interview with Hip Hop activist and artist Mos Def, where questioned about their consciousness and commitment to the culture of hip hop due in part to their perceived social privilege (Gubitz, 2012). Both Gubitz and Bromley, a bit agitated and a lot challenged, set out to make a difference and indirectly prove Mos Def wrong. The result of their brain trust was the first Hip Hop Congress website.

It may be coincidence or organic environmental nurturing, but the very fact that a social site was founded in southern California may or may not be fortuitous. The most profound and revolutionary social media sites (Napster, Myspace, Facebook and Twitter) all find themselves either being created or head quartered in central or southern California. It is unsure if Bromley and Gubitz were inspired by the revolutionary concept of Napster’s founder and college
dropout who settled around the USC campus Shawn Fanning. Napster is a web-based company started in 1999 by creator and college dropout Fanning who created the site to easily share MP3 files and connect users through the music. Fanning took the beta version of his program and transferred it to download.com. From there, it quickly became the most popular download on that website and Fanning quickly saw the potential of the program to make a change in the world. The overwhelming response to his program allowed him to see that this would not be simply some small undertaking but a huge new concept that would continue to increase in popularity. Napster not only challenged the very pillars of the music industry, but socially connected millions of people through music file sharing and marginal socialization.

The Hip Hop Congress site was launched on February 2, 2001 at 5:43 PM (waybackmachine.org). The significance of the launch date is that it precedes other social media sites. The HHC site precedes Friendster, which is considered the “Granddaddy of Social Media Sites” by nearly two years, Myspace also by two years and Facebook and Twitter by four and six years, respectively. The HHC site is predated by two sites in particular that allowed users to create their own website on one and create profiles on another. The Geocities site founded in 1994 in Beverly Hills, California conceptually allowed users to categorize their site by listed characteristics of certain cities such as Hollywood, Wallstreet, and Silicon Valley to name a few. The ability for users to customize the website experience extrapolates these social networking sites from all other websites. Another website that predates the Hip Hop Congress site is theglobe.com. In 1995, theglobe.com attracted millions of subscribers and posted a record IPO of $850 million before losing its value nearly four years later. The unique feature of this technology venture is that the site allowed individuals to publish their own content,
assuring a personalized web experience and interaction that superseded anything in existence prior to the creation and eventual demise of the site.

The original Hip Hop Congress site offered social interaction, customized interest driven content and even personal profiles. In addition, hiphopcongress.com offered users a taste of the most cutting-edge and content conscious hip hop music and culture. One of the most important aspects of the content of the site is that it is a website that sought and still seeks to connect hip hop and activism on a large scale not yet seen when the idea was executed.

“Across our nation and our world there are various levels of inequality. The reason that these inequalities continue to exist is because not enough people stand up against it. A major reason that an individual will not stand out for what he or she believes is that they feel that their opinions are only that, their own. We believe that you will find that people everywhere want the same thing, to be treated with love, to be treated with respect, and to be given the courtesy to choose for themselves. These are simple desires that often times go unfulfilled. Through our passage we will find aspects of life that neglect these simple desires. It is our responsibility to change these aspects. The Hip Hop Congress will be a vehicle for instituting that change.” (web.archive.org, 2001).

These words stand out as a manifesto on the original website as a beacon to all who want to see a change in the world. That call was answered by countless activists and hip hop heads who have been driven to the site and have utilized the content to positively affect their communities and the nation.

The structure of the original website was very typical in that it has the accessible home page menu tabs, as do most websites. The tabs consist of four menu areas: purpose, think, join and contact. Upon clicking on the “purpose” tab, one will see the mission statement which reads: “We are a forum for all people to express their opinions, ideas, hopes and dreams, with the intentions of making words into actions, with the goal of changing the world into a better
place” (web.archive.org, 2001). Strategically placed just below the mission statement, there is subtext under the heading: “Hip Hop Nation.” Similar to the aforementioned Hip Hop Congress manifesto posted on the front page of the site, there is an inspiring call to action in the form of an article entitled *A Giant Can’t Slumber Forever*. The interesting thing about the title of this article is that it is a powerful line from a song entitled K.O.S. (Determination) which stands for *knowledge of self*, written by conscious rapper Talib Kweli. “They tryin’ to lock you down like Attica, the African diaspora represents strength in numbers, a giant can’t slumber forever.” This song has been inspirational to Ron Gubitz and has helped to shape his activism through the culture of hip hop. “Knowledge of Self” by Black Star is the song that was playing nonstop in my mind and CD player in 2000 when I started HHC, and then transferred to IU” (Hatch & McQuillen, 2006).

The article captures the sheer essence and magnitude of the concept of a force or aesthetic that transcends the multiple designations that separate humanity. “This concept of the Hip Hop Nation is interesting because of the possibility it presents. People of many different backgrounds, religion, and skin color all listen to hip hop. Hip hop is the glue for all of these people” (web.archive.org, 2001). The article also frames the lofty aspirations of hip hop as a movement and furthermore positions Hip Hop Congress as one of the catalysts for the hip hop movement going forward.

“...Hip hop can be for everyone, because hip hop is what we make it... And conversely, if we are educated, with morals, direction, identity, and self-knowledge, then hip hop will be the tools with which all people become united through these pillars.” The article goes on to suggest that if one self-identifies with the hip hop nation, he or she should expect the best out of himself or herself and expect only the best out of the culture that has the ability to unify. “Hip hop has potential. That will be the last time I ever type that
sentence. Potential is a word cowards hide behind to cover up the fact they are too scared to grow, learn and change.” (web.archive.org, 2001

A Giant Can’t Slumber Forever then defines what it means to be a nation by outlining three aspects that need to be present in order to self-classify as a nation. Within defining the tenants of achieving status as a nation, the article creatively adjoins the multicultural aspect of what can be assumed is the compositional make up of HHC with the aesthetics of hip hop itself.

“In my studies, I came across a theory that says to be a Nation, three factors are necessary: people, language, and land. Sounds simple. You need to have a place for your people to live and then a language so they can converse, create laws, and learn. Hip hop has people. We are a heterogeneous people. We don’t look the same. Some of us are intellectual, some are gangsters, some are religious, some are pranksters. But we realize we are all the same when we bounce in the club to hip hop. We even have a flag. At the Spitkickers tour, we were all asked to raise our hip hop flags. Our hands. Our hands are all different shapes, sizes, and colors, but for Hip Hop it constitutes a symbol of pride, of unity, of reaching for something more. Hip hop has a language. It is not ebonics. It is not ghetto-talk. It is hip hop. The language constantly reinvents itself, changes with the person. Every communicator in hip hop takes the language, spins it with his own flavor, and then passes it on in conversation, or in rhyme. All the more reason to communicate. Our language is one that we understand, and it binds us together. Hip hop has a land. Our land is the mind and hearts of all people. We don’t need to be a nation that has acres of soil. Hell no! Our land is limitless. We can plant seeds in it, we can build foundations upon it, we can cultivate it for our own benefit.” (web.archive.org, 2001)

These motivating words have been the foundation for HHC’s development, growth and boldness as an entity. The belief that hip hop has the transformative power to change lives for the positive is explicitly announced and serves as a guiding light for all those who want to see a better world through hip hop culture.

The impact that technology has played on the hip hop movement is profound. It is inconceivable to think of a modern movement without the aid of the advancements of
technology. In fact, it is the utilization of technology in unconventional ways that pushes the boundaries of technology usage and the very limits of technology itself (Fisher, 2001). It is hard to believe that Gubitz and Bromley could have foreseen the impact of creating this website and simultaneously creating the student organization on USC campus which will become Hip Hop Congress’ first collegiate chapter as hard as it is to believe that Noble and Robinson could have predicted growth and spread of the artist development portion of HHC. One thing for certain is that the creation of the website and the calculation that it could be used in a social media driven way to affect change is prevalent in the wording on the site which predates the social media giants. The main difference is that Bromley and Gubitz did it not for popularity or money, neither for notoriety nor frivolity, but to see a network of caring and considerate masses grow stronger by sharing their burdens to alleviate the world of what ails it. The responsibility is heavy and the burden even more so. The reciprocity lightens the load one connection one ally at a time, until a change is witnessed through collective eyes, collective effort, and collective inertia. These words optimistically foretell the guileless hope and passion the website was to represent and bring to all who need something to hope for, something to rally around, something to utilize as a tool of mobilization.

“The Internet is a proper vehicle for this change. It is a tool that can be used to connect and unite. Like the electron cloud, the Internet is constantly moving and throbbing with waves of energy, of information. It is a cauldron of knowledge that all people can dip their minds into. It has the possibility to connect with everyone in the world, while not having to travel the world around. Knowledge is power, and the Internet provides the key to limitless social change.” (web.archive.org, 2001)

The Hip Hop Congress website has played a very important role in connecting the hip hop generation to one another and to the activism generated and publicized on the site.
According to Shamako Noble (2012), between the years of 2005 to 2009, the site averaged 25,000-30,000 hits a month. He admits that it has slowed considerably. Noble attributes this slow down secondarily, to the need for more constant updating and more cutting edge material. He also cited the loss of a “Google Grant” as the primary reason. A “Google Grant” is free search engine advertising that is given to 501©3 corporations, giving them the ability to be one of the first search results that is listed when key words are searched. This is a free service provided by Google to assist nonprofits in advertising. In the case of HHC, words such as “hip hop” when typed in to the search bar, essentially drive the Google user to the Hip Hop Congress site. The website is also displayed on the right hand side of the search result under the heading “Related Search.” The Google search engine user now has at least two methods by which to be driven to a site, by the listed search result and by “Related Search” on the right hand side of the result of the key word queried. It is considered a grant because those spots cost money to secure, but for nonprofits Google will give a monthly stipend. “Google allows an ‘ad spend’ of up to $10,000 per month, but says that the typical grantee in its program receives just over $300 worth of advertising on Google.com per month.” (Fritz, 2012). That grant has since expired and now the leadership is searching to redevelop the site and continue to attract browsers and provide activist content for the hip hop generation. Noble (2012), during a conversation, admitted that the site needs re-tooling and can use an upgrade in several areas to remain a cyber-concentration for hip hop community engagement. Currently the site is managed internally and updated by HHC member Aaron Berkowitz and the free services of internet software company Wordpress.
With the success and innovations of the Hip Hop Congress website, plans were made to expand the functionality of the site beyond artist promotion, editorial, community involvement and the preservation of hip hop culture, but was extended to the lofty endeavors of education.

“The Hip Hop Congress website posts diverse views on a variety of issues in order to inspire thought, online conversation and subsequent activity in the ‘real world’. With over 3,000 hits a day from all over the world, the Hip Hop Congress is gaining a reputation for being a worldwide hub for education due to our honest yet critical reporting and wide breadth of coverage.” (Berkowitz, 2008)

The intent for the website to gain another dimension came on one of the days between June 22 and 25th when in Colorado at the National HHC convention, education was voted as a national initiative of the organization. Prior to this moment, most if not nearly all chapters engaged in some form of educating; however, the board voted unanimously to make it a national platform. With the ushering in of an educational agenda, plans began to integrate hip hop education specific information onto the website, as well as create a forum for educators to converse, share ideas and lesson plans while supporting the hip hop education movement. The outcome of the initial strategic plan was to implement the Urban Teachers Network.

The mission of overseeing the implementation of the Urban Teachers Network was given to Dr. Tina Wright. The Sociology Professor and HHC Advisory member was tasked with the primary design and content of the site. The primary trajectory of the UTN as it is also referred to, is a website where educators find support for one another, share lesson plans, and network as well. Hip Hop Congress continues to create innovative ways to galvanize the ranks of hip hop activists as they preserve the culture and continue the struggle for a better world.

As the plans moved forward, the initial phase of application, according to Dr. Wright (2011) was
to utilize the popularity and functionality of Facebook and eventually become a part of the HHC website. The site was officially launched on February 24, 2010. The utilization of Facebook for a temporary host was important because of its popularity amongst a similar demographic to HHC’s group of support.

“According to Facebook’s statistics page, the number of active users has doubled every 6 months, with 250,000 new users joining each day since January 2007 for an average of 3% growth per week. According to internet-ranking company comScore, Facebook is the sixth most trafficked site in the U.S., with the average user spending 20 minutes a day actively using Facebook by uploading photos, sending messages, or even having discussions within a group. The highly coveted demographic (from 18 to 25 years old) is 52% of Facebook’s userbase, averaging 30 to 45 minutes each day on the site.” (Krivak, 2008)

The Urban Teachers Network utilizes the modern technology of Facebook to connect participants of the educational collective. The Facebook group is seeking to define regional Urban Teachers Network groups to better define local participants in hopes of creating a strong and cohesive national UTN infrastructure that will assist in doing the following: 1) Creating an ongoing database of educators and mentors working directly with the youth in the community; 2) Promoting urban arts education and hip hop pedagogy; 3) Sharing effective curricular and extracurricular ideas; 4) Creating, maintaining and sharing digital online classroom resources; 5) Fostering regional support groups; and 6) Organizing UTN events outside of the classroom for student enrichment and mentoring (Harris, 2010). This conglomerate is designed to, when utilized effectively, strengthen hip hop pedagogy and create a support system of educators extrapolated from urban cores. As the educational system continues to fail low-income students, Hip Hop Congress has accepted the mantel of ownership in introducing an alternative curriculum and solution. Hip Hop Congress, along with many other like-minded organizations
who see the validity in hip hop culture’s transformative capacity, have partnered with others to maximize the effort of re-engaging youth in the educational process.

Beyond strengthening pedagogy, the intent of the UTN is also to generally support other educators who fight an uphill battle against miseducation, ridged state standards and the hierarchical inequalities that education often supports. Dr. Wright, on a blog entitled *Join the Urban Teachers Network* written for the Hip Hop Association, an ally of Hip Hop Congress, had this to say about the importance of teachers supporting teachers:

“Teachers have many tough issues to deal with while trying to educate and elevate today’s youth in this oppressive structure. The truth is the school system in many ways maintains the status quo structure of injustice and inequality. Teachers and even many administrators work hard to change that but often find themselves penalized for thinking outside the box and being more relevant to their students’ lives.” (Wright, 2007).

The UTN site, outside of the online support group, was to function as a regional support group, designating meeting places to strategize regional outings. Additionally, according to Dr. Wright, the regional groups are designed to promote local and regional youth activism through interactive workshops, utilizing digital online classrooms.

It has been nearly six years since the launching of the UTN site on Facebook and many of the lofty ideas and goals for the site have been significantly deferred. Wright (2012) credits a lack of full-time staffing and additional to or complementary of this issue is a lack of funding and significant resourcing. These factors, according to Wright, play a key role in maximizing the potential of such a behemoth social media undertaking. She says that a centralized operation driven by the national leadership would, in essence, give more direction and cohesion to the local chapter. However, this effort is severely hampered by a lack of funding to push national
agendas locally. There would be a measure of accountability not currently existing with funding for specific programs and projects. She says the process of programming and functioning lacks structure and is too organic by nature. However, the motto that the organization has recently adopted – “YOU DON’T JOIN HIP HOP CONGRESS, HIP CONGRESS JOINS YOU” – speaks volumes of the intended organic nature designed to lend support to local efforts, respecting the indigenous struggle and culture associated with each individual chapter. Wright goes on to say that securing funding for chapter programming would bolster the quality of programs, as well as incentivize a cohesive platform. She goes on to suggest that Auburn’s chapter, located in Auburn, California near Sacramento, is a model chapter in the fact that they have a two-day workshop intended to teach about the organization, its mission, focus and founding principles (Wright, 2012).

Wright (2010), in an email to the National Board, suggests that the structure for a social media urban education platform is there, but she feels there isn’t a solid structural connection to maximize the potential as she and others initially envisioned it. She makes reference to the fact that the UTN was to not only be a network to share ideas, create on-line education courses and serve as a regional incubator for urban teachers and hip hop educators, but was to also be an archive for hip hop conservation, the latter never implemented. To Dr. Wright’s credit, her belief that the Urban Teachers Network site can and should be better organized, implemented and its potential maximized, shows hers and others’ deep commitment to advance hip hop education through this conduit for social media. Aforementioned reasons for its underutilization and underdevelopment leave the proponents of this project often discontent with the direction of the UTN. However, to the credit and hard work of Dr. Wright and others,
the UTN functions as a resource for the national and international masses that find strength, ideas and a captive audience of like-minded individuals trying to save those whom society says are cast off and discounted, through ground breaking models of teaching.

The reality of the Urban Teachers Network serving as an outlet for unique and dynamic content in teaching is reflective in the cadre of users and followers of the UTN on Facebook. According to the Facebook insite (2012), the regulatory calculator of Facebook, the Urban Teachers Network has 1, 225, 000 friends, fans and followers. To understand this concept as presented as categories of facebook usage, one must look no further than front of the Facebook page. Beneath the “email” and “password” sign-in, the map of the globe, people and lines connecting people all over the globe and to the right of that the obligatory sign-up which states “It’s Free and Always Will Be,” is the initiatory information gathered by Facebook: First Name, Last Name, Email, Re-Entered Email, New Password, Gender and Birth date and year. This information has been filled out by over 350 million users and seen daily by over 100 million users daily (Facebook statics, 2012). At the bottom of the Facebook page is listed in tiny print the tabs for disclaimers, legal ramifications and other detailed specific usages. The tabs read: Mobile · Find Friends · Badges · People · Pages · About · Advertising · Create a Page · Developers · Careers · Privacy · Terms and Help.

Upon clicking on the tab “Terms,” revealed is a listing of 18 statements of rights and responsibilities. Under rights and responsibility listing number 17 is all of the terms used in the utilization of Facebook. The words friend, fan, and follower are listed in this section. The term “friend” refers to Facebook users who are invited or asked to join the page of any Facebook user. A Facebook user can either have a private or public Facebook page. If the page is private
then a Facebook user has to be accepted as a Facebook friend. If the Facebook page is public like the UTN site, then someone can be an automatic friend. In terms of “followers” in relation to Facebook, followers will receive a news feed which will update them on any announcements, photos or any other postings. Simply put, a follower has access to all information to followed Facebook members information. A fan differs from both friends and followers in that a fan is part of a specific group, often times a smaller group within a larger group. Oftentimes fans are reserved organizations such as HHC’s UTN or artists. According to Facebook in site, the Urban Teachers Network has around 965 visits or hits per week, with group traffic peaking at 1288 visitors weekly and 1474 Facebook users that “like” the content on the Urban Teachers Network page, totaling over 1.2 million friends and fans of the site.

_Hip Hop Educators Unite: Voices of the Urban Teachers Network_

“Are you up for revolution? Down for changes? Do you wanna speak your mind without being famous? Then the Hip Hop Congress is the place to do it. Hip Hop Congress. Say Something. Stand up and make a difference. Define what the Hip Hop Nation is. Define what Hip Hop is. We can take this to a higher level. We can make this very beautiful.” ([web.archive.org](https://web.archive.org), 2001)

The sheer number of supporters and the volume of traffic driven to the site are quite impressive for a concept and project in its infancy. What is more impressive than this fact is the energy and excitement created by the content of the Urban Teachers Network. When reviewing the site, it is apparent that the friends of the site have a very similar purpose in actively engaging, meaning their interest in education as an element or tool of transformative power, but diverge in their fulfillment through the utilization of the site. When surveying the various messages on the site, three very distinct interests stand out and seem to be the motivating factor in the educator UTN interactions: 1) support in daily classroom life, often in
the form of relaying frustrations about administration and school standards; 2) Self-promotion of educational services or products; and 3) Solicitation of hip hop educational resources or educational advice. These three interests serve as a source of generative dialogue and cyber interaction.

These teacher-centered interests are equally as important as the indirect benefit students receive from cohabitating classroom space and thoughtful planned out lessons with an educator who understands. The Urban Teachers Network is the conduit to enhance student centered learning through various means of fortifying the process of education with the popularity of social media. The first message sent out alerting the education community that the UTN was here read like a declaration of a rallying cry to take back the educational process for those often harmed and hindered by the inconsistencies in policies and resource allocation.

“We are not waiting for the Department of Education and school districts to do right by our youth... we are all we need. Join UTN and we can build a support network and develop programs to reach and teach our youth! See Info and Discussions tabs for more information.”

As a national and international organization dedicated to its mission, Hip Hop Congress has chosen Education as a central initiative promoted by its artists, chapters, partners, and donors. As the educational system continues to fail American students (particularly low-income and students of color), alternative curriculum and solutions are needed. From this emphasis, HHC is working to organize and support an Urban Teacher Network where educators and youth mentors can form networks to share ideas, curriculum, and build after-school extracurricular and mentor programs for the youth they teach and reach. The UTN is also designed to be a space where teachers facing the daily challenges of their field can find comfort in the company
and support of colleagues with similar experiences. UTN members will create regional support
groups and meet regularly in order to build alliances and power in like-minded educators
wanting to connect and build a movement to enrich the lives of urban youth inside and outside
of the classroom.

Under the name Emancipation Dissonance by One Fiesty Female
“I understand teachers’ frustration at being ‘professionally developed’ when they are
really being trained. Many have been forced to sit in seemingly endless 1-1.5 hour
sessions every Tuesday afternoon or taken away from their classrooms or their families
for 1-5 whole day sessions to be trained. When teachers already put in quite a bit of
time outside of the school day preparing for their students, taking time away from them
when the point is unclear or repetitive is a tedious waste of time. I have been in similar
trainings and they are painful! Sometimes the content is challenging and I am afraid of
looking stupid in front of my peers. Sometimes the agenda includes yet another session
on ‘blending’ or ‘how to make a fraction kit.’ But I made a conscious decision to
maintain focus.” -by Monica Black on January 22, 2012

One Fiesty Female writes that the current education system “…has ushered in... a cookie
cutter approach to instruction.” One can infer that these educational models have exacerbated
our failing education system and left our youth without the ability to deal with dissonance.
Many studies I have read indicate that by creating and resolving cognitive dissonance, students’
motivation for learning can be significantly impacted. One example I read utilized a justification
paradigm to increase students’ enthusiasm for educational activities by offering no external
reward for students’ efforts. The research concluded that students who can attribute their work
to an external reward stop working in the absence of that reward, while those who are forced
to attribute their work to intrinsic motivation came to find the task genuinely enjoyable. Jose
Ometeotl said this on January 23, 2012 at 9:17 am.
“Schooling has been one powerful way to reproduce colonial repression by justifying and perpetuating, inside the classroom, existing power relations and, whether intentionally or out of the teachers’ own ignorance, hiding from students, especially those of color, alternative histories. This prevents students from learning the societies and cultures from which oppressed people come and the great things those societies and cultures have achieved. If students from oppressed groups are not aware of the histories that have shaped them, then no one is likely to know what has shaped anyone. In the words of James Baldwin, ‘Because if I am not what I’ve been told I am, then it means that you’re not what you thought you were either.’” September 5, 2011

“Writing Reports - This is a great resource for teachers who struggle to write professional, positively stated report comments. It’s an online programme where you can choose the curriculum area, strand, level to access a list of options from the comment bank. It even adds the child’s name to the comments you choose - then cut and paste to report cards. It’s a great help especially for teachers for whom English is a second language or for those just looking for the right way to say something. It has a demo that you can try out first... it's great.”

“Good Morning, Educators! My name is Kim Kim Tinisha Telfair, Owner of Telfair & Co. and I would like to introduce my company to you as we provide administrative support to educators. I do recognize and understand the financial hardships of educators in this country but my company wants to support you as best as possible in the war on education. Please visit me. Kim Tinisha Telfair shared a link.” June 13, 2011

“Hip Hop Education Week – April 4-11, 2011 @ ECC and CITYWIDE in NEWARK, NJ networkedblogs.com. Join us at Essex County College, Newark City Hall, NJPAC and Central High School for our week-long, citywide celebration and exploration of Hip Hop. Urban Teachers Network shared a link.” April 4, 2011

“Children's Africana Book Awards. The Children’s Africana Book Awards (CABA) are given under the auspices of the Outreach Council of the African Studies Association, a non-profit corporation founded in 1957 and open to all persons and institutions interested in African affairs.” Nafisa Adeeb, October 22, 2011

“Afternoon everybody... I just joined this site and I am wondering if there are any teachers who teach any afrocentric studies: African American history, I also teach the origin of hip hop cultures... so if there is anybody who teaches any afrocentric studies or know someone who does or any good website/resource that I can use please let me know... I have ideas that I can share... what good is knowledge if you don’t share it.” Bernard C. Harris, August 7, 2011
“With racial and sexual crimes occurring on college campuses across the United States, one nonprofit student organization believes hip hop is the ultimate solution. The Hip Hop Congress Student Union, which has chapters at the University of Southern California at Los Angeles, the University of Massachusetts at Lowell and Brandeis University, is trying to make a change for the better at colleges nationwide.” (Lackey, 2001).
CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATION & CONCLUSION

A. Introduction

Rooted in the belief in the powerful potential of the hip hop movement, the history of Hip Hop Congress is a story of an organization that has leveraged its identity to change the culture of hip hop for the betterment of the current generation and subsequent ones who love hip hop and desire a platform in which their voice is heard. From Hip Hop Congress’ early days as an artist development group on through its growth as a power-based hip hop organization with over thirty chapters in the US and abroad, HHC has retained its core value of “constantly developing progressive initiatives to foster inspiration and action in local communities” (hiphopcongress.com). From this credence abound its many strategic alliances and platforms that have assisted in shaping and reshaping the very definition of hip hop and further hip hop activism. The Artist Program, Chapter Program, Education Program and Online Program all culminate to collage a picture of an organization that has been in the forefront of initiatives around the utilization of hip hop in the classroom and mobilizing the hip hop community through social media.

The development of Hip Hop Congress’ educational initiative coincides with the very development of hip hop pedagogy. The pioneering dynamics that compelled many of the organization founders and members to take up the mantle of education through alternative means proved to be the impetus for the development of the Urban Teachers Network as a means of connecting, developing and supporting ideas of urban pedagogy. The research shows the advancement of hip hop pedagogy through social media as well as the connections
developed through the HHC board members to selflessly devote their time and effort to a cause with very little gratification outside of internal drive. The data demonstrates the ways in which the history of this organization through its growth and development has influenced the board and other members and chapters who utilize the notion of hip hop as a tool for teaching and empowerment.

This study examined the partially untold history of a group of action-oriented young adults who alleged that hip hop could change lives and the development of one of the life changing tenets, Hip Hop Education. Understanding the magnitude of social media before most of the world did, Hip Hop Congress developed an online activist platform that will become the forerunner of the educational conduit Urban Teachers Network.

**B. Summary of Findings**

The findings revealed that the history of Hip Hop Congress coincides with many of the most recent events that have taken place in the world of hip hop. Their alliances with many other hip hop-oriented organizations have facilitated the trajectory of many of HHC’s missions as an organization. Similarly, the forward-thinking of the group has influenced other activist groups. Their influence can be seen in areas of artist development, hip hop activism and in the Freirian theory of hip hop education. The Freirian theory of hip hop education has played an active role in both students and educators’ lives by creating a system of reciprocity, re-defining the role of a teacher and pedagogy, aligning students as stakeholders in their empowerment and education while allowing both teachers and students to develop critically, and fostering strengths.
The Urban Teachers Network, as an extension of the educational initiative of Hip Hop Congress and the online program initiative, exists as a conduit and incubator for hip hop pedagogy. The findings reveal that the UTN site serves a multi-tiered purpose. Upon accessing the site, one can see that its initial drive is to socially connect educators. Beneath its primary purpose, secondarily, educators are able to support one another, share best practices and advertise events and services. Tertiary to the prior purposes listed is the over-arching impetus of the advancement of hip hop pedagogy and the generation of a counter-identity as an educator. The latter discovery became the push to answer the questions: Why is the history of HHC important and more germane to this issue and how does the history and development of an educational initiative facilitate the advancement of hip hop pedagogy and activism through a counter-cultural identity as an educator? These questions were addressed through this research.

C. Significance of Recording Hip Hop History

In a lecture given by Bakari Kitwana, author and coiner of the term “Hip Hop Generation,” he expressed the importance and the damage of not keeping account of hip hop’s history. In paraphrase he suggested that hip hop activism has done incredible things for the urban community and American society as a whole, but will never be given credit because of a lack of adequate accounting. The danger of the persistence of this lack of retelling of hip hop history can lead to the erasure of and the coopted revision of the past. This project is an effort towards the conservation of the history of an organization that spans nearly two decades in time, nearly half the history of hip hop itself. This is significant. Additionally, the organization has distinguished itself not only because of longevity, but also through momentous
contributions to hip hop activism. The interesting thing about conducting the research is that many of the members collected and retained countless documents, emails and other effects of record, but never elected to write down the history while fresh in mind. Perceptively, many were more than cooperative in making copies and or relinquishing documents, which can be seen as a sign that they believe the history needs to be written and are relieved that someone is researching and writing it.

The organization, because of its tireless effort to revolutionize community engagement and being perpetual activists on many fronts, has been able to claim independently or with a select few, first in regards to social media. After reviewing the Hip Hop Congress website when it was created – thanks to the website histo-graph “The Way Back Machine” – the Congress site can claim to being the first social media site in the fact that they had profile pages (mainly of the artists that they promoted) and it allowed individuals to comment on articles and daily communications from the founders. Beyond its inception being positioned ahead of the major social network sites, the site can also claim or share claim to being the first blog site as well. The fact that there were daily uploads of content from individual perspectives and the site gave permission for daily comments, constituting the first site as a blog. All of these innovations were done in the name of hip hop activism, which make them even more significant to popular culture and the preservation of hip hop history.

**D. Discussion of Findings**

When Hip Hop Congress was initially solicited about conducting this research on the group and their historic efforts in activism and hip hop education, all on the executive board were in agreement that this project needed to be conducted. Once the project was underway,
many of the members began to hint at the possibility of simultaneously piloting research on the history of the organization as a whole. The unspoken agreement was reached and the most sensible outcome ensued. See, it is nearly impossible to tell the story of the programmatic efforts of the organization without a clear and concise assessment of the foregrounding that lead to the conceptual framework behind the creation of HHC’s revolutionary platforms. Past this point, the programmatic efforts, when assessed longitudinally, create a composite story of the progressivity of this enigmatic group.

The history of Hip Hop Congress is literally the history of hip hop itself. Although admittedly, the writing of the history is incomplete, missing several nuanced perspectives, the history is one of being on the forefront of conscious artist development through an incubator system that goes back nearly twenty years (1993-to present). Additionally, a part of the history is spent telling how the organization became one of the first organizations to take on education from a hip hop-based perspective (2003-2008). The year 2008 is not the conclusion of HHC’s hip hop education initiative, but the start of a redirecting to hip hop and politics. This shift was such that Kitwana (2012), in the fourth coming book *Hip-Hop Activism in the Obama Era,* devotes a considerable amount of time and effort to proclaiming Hip Hop Congress as one of the reasons that Obama was elected, based on their activism in mobilizing the hip hop community to become politically-engaged. History shows that Hip Hop Congress endorsed Cynthia McKinney and Hip Hop Activist and Green Party Vice-Presidential Candidate Rosa Clemente. It is still historically accurate to credit the group with prior to 2008 marrying hip hop and politics, laying a grassroots foundation for the Obama campaign. The archival data suggests that this organization and others similar to it should be researched from a sociological
and historical perspective to inform how hip hop activism underpins the pervasive notions of socio-cultural norms in the new millennium. Additionally, juxtaposing the hip hop education and hip hop political movements with other organic social prods towards equality in U.S. history would reveal a lot about this organization and this particular space in time.

E. Implication for Teaching

Hip Hop Education from its beginnings has organically moved from an art form that when imbued with “conscious” and political contextualization has been a method of teaching any number of lessons through the syncopation of rap. Most educators who self-identify as hip hop educators grew up with these lyrical lessons or have any other number of contacts with hip hop culture through the foundational concept of hip hop as public pedagogy. Now as educators, the connection between the classroom and the raw unfettered hip hop empowerment has become saliently matrimonial. Because of the close proximity to the culture, many of the board members recall making a natural connection between the organic nature of hip hop and teaching. Most expressed the need to give back to the culture that has given them so much and introduce to subsequent generations to the force called hip hop. This is achieved through the Urban Teachers Network amongst other initiatives.

The power of hip hop education to fortify through student-centered education so granularly mirror the theories and philosophy of Paulo Freire that the book in which he espoused his beliefs, The Pedagogy of The Oppressed, should be considered the manifesto for hip hop educators. Many hip hop educators have made the connection between the praxis of education and the multi-layered views on student-centered learning credited to Freire. The four core values for Freirean theory perfectly align with the core tenets that propel the
necessity for hip hop education. The justification for a pedagogy of the oppressed or a hip hop pedagogy delineates the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, the banking concept in education and its hazards to the learning process, the essence of education as a practice of freedom for the oppressed and anti-dialogic and dialogic theorems and their dialectic positioning as instruments of oppression or instruments of liberation. These theorems correlate with the over-arching implications of research gathered on the positive outcomes of utilizing hip hop pedagogy in the classroom. Issues such as the reduction of violence, the reduction of recidivism and truancy have been extrapolated from the data here-in. Conversely, the data also suggests that hip hop education increases test scores in such areas as literacy, mathematics and social studies, while also increasing self-efficacy amongst adolescents. Lastly, in light of all the aforementioned implications for the teaching profession, multiple suggestions for advancing hip hop education as a canonical platform would be to standardize the teaching of this pedagogy in urban teacher education programs, teach in educational leadership/administration programs and increase resources for teachers who want to utilize hip hop education in curricula, lesson plans, extracurricular experiences and in publishing.

F. Implication for Research

To address the issue around implication for research, a multi-layered approach must be taken to first expound on the significance of researching social media as an aesthetic for the creation and proliferation of ideas and advancement of those ideas. Next, from an educational stand-point, how a site like the Urban Teachers Network can strengthen ties with administration and local educational institutions. The first implication being, what can be learned intrinsically from researching not only social media, but the pathology of those who
engage in social media? There is a study being conducted at the University of Southern California, ironically one of the points of origin for Hip Hop Congress, which looks at the pervasive implication of social media on the counter-cultural identities of adolescents who use social media. Studies like this one increase the validity of research that seeks not only to address the usage of a social media site for the sake of education, but to also assess the identity formation associated with belonging to a group of hip hop educators. The second implication being, how can education programs and other education leadership auxiliaries effectively interface with the knowledge base, talents, teaching artists and resources of the Urban Teachers Network to create assistance in advancing faculty and curricular progression?

A comprehensive effort is needed to assess all programs, services and resources that self-identify as hip hop education or pedagogy. As reported in the research, the first effort to ascertain the totality of programs was a success, but there is more assessment needed. The Urban Teachers Network is also an effort to corral all hip hop educational efforts under one umbrella. The limitations in that effort were also noted. One of the most noted limitations of this study is that it lacked comprehensive data-driven research. Most of the research was archival, leaving many voices unheard in the process, lacking much qualitative data. The last implication being a true assessment of how the Urban Teachers Network interaction and curricula and lesson plan sharing actually impacted the students from whom the lesson plans were written and shared. How effective was the reciprocal interactions via the Urban Teachers Network in addressing the needs of the students in the local classroom? How can those experiences be quantified and how can that process be duplicated beyond the UTN to share with other educators not in the collective network?
G. Summary

In summary, Hip Hop Congress, through the Urban Teachers Network, shares a long historical legacy with the origins of activism in hip hop culture, beginning with the founding by Afrika Bambaata, the first hip hop activist. The members of Hip Hop Congress share a commonality and that is community activism, whether it is through the artistry of progressive messaging through rap music, grassroots activism in local communities under the banner of hip hop or through addressing of systemic failure in the educational system through the infusion of hip hop in the classroom, the collective proudly wear the label “activist.” Beyond the group, the UTN is an extension of intergroup ideology. Those educators who join by random encounter quickly are exposed to the ideas and philosophies that make Hip Hop Congress who they are, which gradually or not so gradually create an identity, transcending the initial self-identification as an educator interested in the utilization of hip hop in curricula. This identity allows for the UTN participant to begin the process of creating one’s own concept of the utilization of hip hop in the curriculum, made possible by the guiding principles or functions conveyed through the research on the UTN as socially connecting educators, the ability to support one another, share best practices, advancement of hip hop pedagogy and the generation of a counter-identity as an educator. The implementation of that identity will potentially keep educators cognizant of rejecting the banking process, teaching with liberation as the focus of all lessons, and shunning all educational tools of oppression in the classroom – all made possible by the historic efforts of Hip Hop Congress through their educational initiative.
H. Conclusion

Hip Hop Congress is an organization that is founded on the possibility of creating a hip hop culture that reflects the best of the culture, while proactively empowering all to work for a better world. From the inception of the group, the mission and aim have always been to work for racial as well as social unity. The fact that four young men of varying ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds came together for a greater cause has been the underpinning philosophy of Hip Hop Congress. This cultural inclusive ethos has guided the members from the beginning to this very day. The organization, because of its inclusive nature, has been a beacon of light for many to find acceptance through a culture that initially sought to change the climate which affected their existence. While everything changes with time, the sentiment of Hip Hop Congress remains true to its philosophical core, due to the involvement of the founders and multicultural membership that utilizes hip hop as a conduit of common ground. The vision is one of transforming power. One of the founders, Shamako Noble, sums up the mission and focus of the organization with these words:

My vision for Hip Hop Congress is clear
and I believe in line with the vision of the leadership of this organization,
but please correct me if I’m mistaken.

I believe that culture,
(here defined as the collective creative works of a given society),
sets the back drop for world view.
I believe that hip hop, as a culture,
is in many ways a culmination of many of the world’s cultures throughout time:
tribal and "civilized," technological and natural.
I believe the cypher,
whether cats are rhyming in it or playing dice in it,
is as ancient as humanity itself.
Probably older.
I believe that globally, hip hop wants a better world... 
fuck that, 
hip hop wants the best possible world. 
I believe that hip hop will use elections, 
will use referendums and ballots... 
But mainly I believe hip hop and all culture can change how you feel 
about life, our planet, and our fellow humanity. 
This does not replace a vote, 
but it does not have to. 
They are complementary and not exclusive.

My vision is a self-sustaining global network of leaders; 
powerful, beautiful, brilliant; 
capable and ready nodes plugged into the hum of Hip Hop Congress. 
This network is a technologically savvy, 
Culturally exceptional, socially and spiritually conscious. 
This network, a tightly knit decentralized community 
within larger communities will take on, 
as its responsibility, using hip hop, 
and whatever other tools we can muster 
to create the world we want to live in. 
We will not wait for permission, a suggestion or an opening. 
We recognize that this is our time. 
In my vision this network is Voltron, 
and it can be found in every state of the union, 
in the 50 largest cities of America, 
on reservations, in hoods and barrios, 
in community centers and classrooms. 
This network is in Mexico and Venezuela, Nigeria and France. 
This network is thousands and thousands and thousands of miles 
separated and joined by a thought and a (heart)beat.

We exist for the poorest kid on the block, 
but we will give just as much meaning, 
support, consciousness and love to the richest 
in the effort to create the planet that we envision. 
We will help find and create the leaders of this new paradigm. 
We will do this with our programs, 
designed to identify, empower, train and connect these critical leaders. 
We will be the best there is at this task.
We will create a global network of leaders that use hip hop and other forms of culture development like education and marketing and promotions to raise the consciousness of our earth, for our children and for their children.

We will dream. We will dream big. And when we wake up it will be real. It will take all of us. Every single one of us. And more than that, it will take every ounce of who we are individually and collectively. There is not one among us who is not needed. There is not one among us who has not been called. There is not one among us who cannot meet what lies ahead.
APPENDIX A

HIP HOP CONGRESS AWARENESS PACKET

This packet has been put together to introduce and highlight the non-profit organization Hip Hop Congress (501c3). By the end of this synopsis we hope that a relationship can be formed between your organization and ours. As our mantra states:

“You don’t join Hip Hop Congress, we join YOU!”

Mission:
Through the vehicle of Hip Hop culture, Hip Hop Congress mobilizes, organizes, and empowers our communities through promoting civic engagement, cooperative economic self-determination, social responsibility, and cultural creativity.

Vision:
The establishment of a regional and national infrastructure to strengthen and unify existing movements and emerging forces in Hip Hop to support cultural, economic, and social justice advancement.

Theory of Change:
By bridging gaps between academic, activist, and entrepreneurial networks within the cultural base of Hip Hop, we provide the platform to identify, address, and impact critical issues affecting our constituency.

NATIONAL OFFICE
The Hip Hop Congress (HHC) national office, comprised of six members available at all times, is an active think tank that devises new initiatives using the HHC’s tools to create new inspiration and action in local communities. The National Office also develops strategic partnerships with other organizations throughout the country to aid local chapters and achieve national initiatives.

Hip Hop Congress' mirror organization, Hip Hop Congress Europe, networks with organizations in France, Africa, England, Belgium and the Czech Republic with the intention of creating after-school programs and sharing projects created in these schools in a pen pal-type relationship through the use of technology such as Web TV. Hip Hop Congress Europe is based in Paris, France. Hip Hop Congress has also been fortunate enough to receive the pro-bono legal services of Manatt Phelps & Phillips, LLP, one of the nation’s premiere corporate law firms.
CHAPTER PROGRAM
Our chapter programs—already located in 40 colleges, high schools and communities nationwide—encourage students and community members to become socially conscious community organizers. Chapters are autonomous workgroups that work in line with Hip Hop Congress' philosophy. Chapters are free to pursue their own programming so long as it holds true to the mission of HHC.

Structurally, the chapters are Hip Hop Congress' pipeline into local communities through programs like Awareness Festivals, Lectures, Academic Discussions, and Hip Hop Concerts that display the four elements of hip hop while exposing its audience on a range of issues, such as local school initiatives and national statutes like the Patriot Act. The chapters also act as local centers for national HHC initiatives, such as its education and artist initiative. More recently, local chapters have conglomerated into regional bases for HHC. Most notably are the chapter conglomerates in Southern California and the Midwest, where yearly regional summits are held on behalf of HHC. Chapter development for HHC is at an all-time high, with roughly 4 new chapters developing per semester.

EDUCATION INITIATIVE
As many services within the educational system become privatized, more and more institutions are looking to independent contractors and consultants for program design and execution. In addition, the application and addition of Urban Arts into the education system through youth centers, events and generational shifts is becoming all the more common. Hip Hop Congress, as a national and international organization that is dedicated to its mission, is constantly looking to develop and work with those developing experimental and pedagogically proven methods of using Hip Hop as a positive motivational and academic tool. That’s why HHC has picked up Education as an initiative and centralization point for its artists, chapters, partners and donors.

ARTIST/CULTURE PROGRAM
The Hip Hop Congress' music program gives artists the classes, resources and mentoring necessary to sculpt their careers. It also connects these artists with events or festivals initiated by other educational groups in order to give the artist practice and exposure while helping that organization draw a more eclectic audience. We currently have approximately 100 artists and groups spanning across the globe in our roster of involved artists.

WEBSITE
The Hip Hop Congress website posts diverse views on a variety of issues in order to inspire thought, on-line conversation and subsequent activity in the 'real world'. With over 3000 hits a day from all over the world, the Hip Hop Congress is gaining a reputation for being a worldwide hub for education due to our honest yet critical reporting and wide breadth of coverage.
**National Office / Board**

Hip Hop Congress is set up with a National Office and Board that oversees the entire organization. Chapters are regionalized and placed under the advisement of a regional director or community chapter head. Included are the bios of the founders. Bios of office and additional board members can be found on the Hip Hop Congress website.

President and Executive Director: Shamako Noble - shamako@hiphopcongress.com
Shamako is a co-founder and current President of Hip Hop Congress. He is also the Director of the H2Ed program for the Hip Hop Association which uses education, media and leadership to preserve and develop Hip Hop culture. Before moving into those two positions, Shamako worked as a Community Outreach and Development Director for a youth center in Menlo Park. As an artist, Shamako has been performing since a very young age. At this time he has performed or organized over 200 events since starting his career. In 2004, he released his first solo album, "The Return of the Coming of the Aftermath." Shamako, who was once known as the "Kevin Bacon of South Bay Hip Hop" is now moving into a similar role nationally. Within the Hip Hop realm, Shamako is involved in culture, industry, education and politics. Locally he also operates with an organization called R.E.F.U.G.E. (Real Education for Urban Growth Enterprises) which specializes in using the Urban Arts to teach life skills, leadership and culture. This organization also gets involved in campaigns as a consultant and advocate working with communities in San Jose, Oakland and the Peninsula (East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Redwood City). This group has collaborated with City Year, Conservation Corp, Public Allies, San Jose State, De Anza College and many other organizations around the Bay Area.

**Board of Directors**

Shamako Noble - Chairman of the Board

Jordan Bromley - jordan@hiphopcongress.com
Jordan Bromley is a co-founder of the Hip Hop Congress. He started the effort with Ron Gubitz in April of 2000. Their “branch” of HHC geared its efforts towards students and is responsible for the development and growth of the Chapter Program. Jordan serves as the Chapter Development Chair and the Administration Chair of HHC. Jordan is a music lawyer at the firm Manatt Phelps and Phillips in Los Angeles. Manatt represents Hip Hop Congress as its pro-bono council. Jordan represents artists in hip hop and rock. Jordan also is a co-owner of Golden Mean Management, a record label and management company based out of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Ron Gubitz - ron.gubitz@teachforamerica.org
Co-Founder and Programming Chair Ron Gubitz currently works as a Recruitment Director for Teach For America after four years teaching English at Vashon High School in St. Louis, where he started the Advanced Placement English Literature course, coached soccer, and founded the first high school chapter of Hip Hop Congress. He also sits on the Board of Directors for the non-
profit Center for Recording Arts based in St. Louis. Ron founded the Indiana University HHC chapter while attending college there. He grew up listening to hip hop in the most unlikely of places: Fort Wayne, Indiana. From this haven, lovingly referred to as “the Fortress,” Ron produced three albums, creating a subgenre he calls Funhop. All of his albums were commercial failures. Ron loves running, IU Hoosiers basketball, and laughing. And he is very attractive.

Amer Ahmed - amer@hiphopcongress.com
Amer Ahmed is an individual with an eclectic personal and professional experience. As a teacher, student, spoken word poet, Hip Hop activist, consultant and administrator, he channels his diverse experiences into work geared towards effective change serving to create mutual benefit for all. During his time in Bloomington, Amer was an Associate Instructor, PR Officer for the Muslim Student Union (during 9/11) and also became integrally part of strengthening Diversity and culture on campus through a fast-growing student organization known as the Hip Hop Congress (www.hiphopcongress.com). Amer now serves as the Chair of Midwest and International Development on the national board for Hip Hop Congress, which has become the largest grassroots Hip Hop organization in the United States. Following his graduate studies, Amer was employed as Director of Intercultural Programs at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. His education, global experience and prominent role in the Hip Hop Congress assisted him in addressing pressing issues of Diversity on campus. Amer recently left his work at Concordia College to pursue a co-directorship at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

National Office
PR Chair/Executive Assistant: Aaron Berkowitz
Executive Assistant/Special Projects: Anita Tobin
Nor Cal District Director/Artist Program Co-Director
Artist Program Co-Director: Brandon Greene
West Coast Regional/Education Liason: Rahman Jamaal
So Cal Regional Director/Artist Program Co-Director: Michael Arrington
Northwest Regional Coordinator/Media Justice Program Director: Julie Chang Schulman
Midwest Regional Coordinator: Asad Jafri
Chicago District Director: J.R. Fleming
Southern Regional Coordinator: Brad "Kamikaze" Franklin
Southeast Regional Coordinator/National Tour Coordinator: Jamale "Quanstar" Harris
Northeast Regional Director: Maurice "Soulfighter" Taylor

List of Chapters
This list will give you an idea of the reach of Hip Hop Congress in various communities and college campuses. To contact any chapter please initially contact Aaron Berkowitz (berkowitz@hiphopcongress.com 314-809-2502)
APPENDIX B

HIP HOP CONGRESS CHAPTER PROGRAM

Our chapter programs—already located in 40 colleges, high schools and communities nationwide — encourage students and community members to become socially conscious community organizers. Chapters are autonomous workgroups that work in line with Hip Hop Congress' philosophy. Chapters are free to pursue their own programming so long as it holds true to the mission of HHC.

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COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL CHAPTERS

- BELOIT COLLEGE (Beloit, WI)
- CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY FULLERTON (Fullerton, CA)
- CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY LOS ANGELES (Los Angeles, CA)
- COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY (Fort Collins, CO)
- COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY (Chicago, IL)
- CONCORDIA COLLEGE (Moorhead, MN)
- GRINNELL COLLEGE (Grinnell, IA)
- INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY (Terre Haute, IN)
- INDIANA UNIVERSITY AT BLOOMINGTON (Bloomington, IN)
- LORAS COLLEGE (Dubuque, IA)
- LOYOLA UNIVERSITY (Chicago, IL)
- MORGAN PARK HIGH SCHOOL (Chicago, IL)
- OHIO UNIVERSITY (Athens, OH)
- SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY (San Diego, CA)
- SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY (San Jose, CA)
- SEATTLE UNIVERSITY (Seattle, WA)
- COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL CHAPTERS, T – Z
- TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS (San Marcos, TX)
- UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE (Irvine, CA)
- UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA RIVERSIDE (Riverside, CA)
- UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER (Boulder, CO)
- UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN (Urbana, IL)
- UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO (Chicago, IL)
- UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA (Honolulu, HI)
- UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE (Princess Anne, MD)
- UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (Los Angeles, CA)
- VASHON HIGH SCHOOL (St. Louis, MO)
- WALNUT HILLS HIGH SCHOOL (Cincinnati, OH)
- WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY AT ST. LOUIS (St. Louis, MO)
- WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY (Detroit, MI)
- WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY (Salem, OR)

**COMMUNITY CHAPTERS**

- LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY CHAPTER
- SAN JOSE COMMUNITY CHAPTER
- CHICAGO COMMUNITY CHAPTER (U-AIM)
- LAS VEGAS COMMUNITY CHAPTER
- CABRINI GREEN COMMUNITY CHAPTER
- CHAPTERS IN DEVELOPMENT, Fresno, Cleveland, Northern Cal Regions, Midwest Regions, Milwaukee, etc.
APPENDIX C

HIP HOP CONGRESS NATIONAL OFFICE & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Hip Hop Congress (HHC) national office, comprised of six members available at all times, is an active think tank that devises new initiatives using the HHC’s tools to create new inspiration and action in local communities. The National Office also develops strategic partnerships with other organizations throughout the country to aid local chapters and achieve national initiatives.

Hip Hop Congress’ mirror organization, Hip Hop Congress Europe, networks with organizations in France, Africa, England, Belgium and the Czech Republic with the intention of creating after-school programs and sharing projects created in these schools in a pen pal-type relationship through the use of technology such as Web TV. Hip Hop Congress Europe is based in Paris, France. Hip Hop Congress has also been fortunate enough to receive the pro-bono legal services of Manatt Phelps & Phillips, LLP, one of the nation’s premiere corporate law firms.

Member of the Board of Directors Job Description and Expectations

Purpose:
To advise, govern, oversee policy and direction, and assist with the leadership and general promotion of HHC so as to support the organization’s mission and needs.

Mission statement:
The Hip Hop Congress provides the Hip Hop Generation and the Post Hip Hop Generation with the tools, resources, and opportunities to make social, economic, and political change on a local, regional, and national level.

Major responsibilities:
- Organizational leadership and advisement
- Organization of the board of directors, officers, and committees
- Formulation and oversight of policies and procedures
- Financial management, including adoption and oversight of the annual budget
- Oversight of program planning and evaluation
- Personnel evaluation and staff development
- Review of organizational and programmatic reports
- Promotion of the organization
- Fundraising and outreach

*Members of the board share these responsibilities while acting in the interest of HHC. Each member is expected to make recommendations based on his or her experience and vantage point in the community.
Length of term:
Three years, which may be renewed up to a maximum of three consecutive terms, pending approval of the board.

Meetings and time commitment:
- The board of directors meets September through June on the second TBD of the month, 7:00 p.m., via conference call. Meetings typically last 90 minutes.
- Committees of the board meet an average of TBD, pending their respective work agenda.
- Board members are asked to attend no more than two special events or meetings per year, as they are determined.

Expectations of board members:
- Attend and participate in meetings on a regular basis, and special events as able.
- Participate on a standing committee of the board, and serve on ad-hoc committees as necessary.
- Be alert to community concerns that can be addressed by HHC mission, objectives, and programs.
- Help communicate and promote HHC mission and programs to the community.
- Become familiar with HHC finances, budget, and financial/resource needs.
- Understand the policies and procedures of HHC.
- Financially support HHC in a manner commensurate with one’s ability.
APPENDIX D

HIP HOP CONGRESS BOARD & COMMITTEE STRUCTURE CHARTS

**Board of Directors**
- 18 members
- Two-year terms
- Other pertinent information

**Advisory Committee** (optional)
Supports organization’s activities by providing information, resources, prestige, money, etc. The committee does not have governing responsibility.

**Executive Committee**
- President
- Vice President
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- At large board members (committee chairs, special needs/assignments, etc.)

**Staff**
- Title
- Title
- Title
- Title

**Ad Hoc Committees**
Form and disband as necessary
- Nominating
- Bylaws
- Special events

**Finance Committee**
- Chairperson
- Name
- Name
- Name

**Fundraising/Development Committee**
- Chairperson
- Name
- Name
- Name

**Marketing and Communications Committee**
- Chairperson
- Name
- Name
- Name

**Personnel Committee**
- Chairperson
- Name
- Name
- Name

**Program Committee**
- Chairperson
- Name
- Name
- Name
HIP HOP CONGRESS NATIONAL BOARD

SHAMAKO NOBLE
President & CEO

ALPHONSO MAYFIELD
Political Director

DARCEL LABRÉE
Artist Development Chair

RON GUBITZ
Programming Chair

RAHMAN JAMAAL
Chapter Liaison

AARON BERKOWITZ
Public Relations Chair

JORDAN BROMLEY
Chapter Development & Administration

AMER AHMED
International Development Chair

SARAH HARRIS
Women’s Integration Program
HIP HOP CONGRESS CHAPTERS & AFFILIATES

PARTNERS & AFFILIATES

CHAPTER LIASION

ARTISTS & PROMOTERS

REGIONAL DIRECTORS

REGIONAL A&R and DELEGATES

COLLEGE CHAPTERS

HIGH SCHOOL CHAPTERS

COMMUNITY CHAPTERS

PRESIDENT & CEO

POLITICAL DIRECTOR

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT CHAIR

PROGRAMMING CHAIR

CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT & ADMINISTRATION

PUBLIC RELATIONS CHAIR

WOMEN’S INTEGRATION PROGRAM

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CHAIR
THE WOMEN’S PROJECT LEADERSHIP CHART

“expanding the presence of the female voice and perspective throughout the culture and industry of Hip Hop”

- Building a network of women who are involved in the culture and industry of Hip Hop
- Supporting existing female Hip Hop organizations and collectives
- Empowering women through the development of knowledge of self (which includes how one relates to Hip Hop and brings it into her life), social gender roles, and community leadership skills
- Forming coalitions with community-based organizations and national organizations in order to collaborate on providing services, events, and workshops to the immediate community

**Women’s Project Structure and Functions**

**Women’s Project Director**

- Women in Hip Hop Listing Outreach
- Women’s Project Public Relations

**Berlin 2008 HHC Representation**

**Artist Program**

**Women’s Project Regional and Chapter Integration**

**Women’s Project Youth Development Perspectives**

**Functions of: Women’s Project Director**

- maintain consistent communication with each area’s HHC members
- support the different areas with ideas and resources
- work in collaboration with H2A and others to create and maintain a public database of Women in Hip Hop
- update the Women in Hip Hop Resource Sheet as needed
Functions of: Women in Hip Hop Listing Outreach

- initiate contact with women involved in Hip Hop through personal knowledge and connections to invite them to be included in the listing
- direct interested women to contact the Women’s Project Director, who will enter them into the listing

Functions of: Women’s Project Public Relations

- reply to inquiries for information about the Women’s Project
- direct interested women to appropriate coordinator and/or liaison
- communicates with the Hip Hop Congress PR Director on a regular basis to inform him of Women’s Project developments
- assist the Hip Hop Congress PR Director with general HHC PR tasks
- oversee the look and functionality of the Women’s Project page on the Hip Hop Congress website
- write and send press releases as needed

Functions of: Berlin 2008 HHC Representation

- create an estimated budget for an HHC member to attend the Women in Hip Hop festival in Berlin
- research and apply for private and university grants and funding for HHC members to attend
- work with the Women’s Project Director and others to identify HHC members to attend
- contact the identified HHC members and coordinate their attendance at the conference

Functions of: Artist Program

- participate in and work on the HHC Artist Program
- if interested, take leadership and/or co-direct the Artist Program

Functions of: Women’s Project Regional and Chapter Integration
(HHC Regional Directors will initially fulfill some of these tasks)

- support chapter heads and regional directors with resources and ideas
- assist chapters in organizing events involving female artists, increasing the number of women in their chapter, and improving communication between male and female members by coaching or mediation
Functions of: Women’s Project Youth Development Coordinator

- develop critical thinking skills in youth around male and female relations and portrayals by adding certain questions and/or details to Hip Hop Education activities
- reframe or alter Hip Hop Education activities to include different gender perspectives
- inform and maintain communication with H2Ed about these alterations

Side Notes

- In order to work with the Women’s Project, interested women should contact the director to become involved. She will send out a copy of the Women’s Project structure to the regional directors and the chapter heads. Outreach will not be done to fill the positions.
- The Women’s Project will consist of the work done by the involved women, guided by loose framework of the Project’s structure and responsibilities, and whatever new ideas and projects they bring to the table and initiate – nothing more, nothing less.
APPENDIX F

THE WOMEN’S PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Implementation Plan for Women in Hip Hop Retreat
(steps and tasks will be delegated to committee members; they are not currently listed in order of priority)

September

- Form planning committee for the retreat
- Appoint a chair for the committee
- Establish bimonthly meeting day and time
- Establish roles of committee members and the time they are able to commit
- Establish the goals and objectives of the retreat
- Decide on three possible locations for the retreat
- Set three potential times in late May or early June for the retreat
- Check on the availability of the locations for these times
- Determine if want to use certain criteria for selecting invitees and if so, establish what the criteria is
- Come up with a list of 30 women to invite
- Come up with a list of 10 alternates
- Establish where funding will be coming from
- Come up with a budget for the retreat
- Appoint a treasurer/accountant for the committee possibly raise funds and/or to keep track of funds available and spent
- Brainstorm potential sponsors
- Identify and notify visual artists about designing a t-shirt

October

- Establish a date, time, and location for the retreat
- Reserve lodging and buildings for the retreat
- Establish a plan for accommodations, transportation, and food
- Contact the 30 women invited
- Narrow down the list of potential sponsors
- Begin working on sponsorship packet
- Contact the potential sponsors
- Brainstorm discussion topics, based on the goals and objectives of the retreat
- Brainstorm workshops and retreat activities
- Contact potential workshop leaders
- Determine how many support people will be needed for the retreat and what their roles will be (registration, direction, etc.)
Determine who will be asked to act as support and contact them
Send out update to Hip Hop Congress monthly update and to Frontline listserv
Determine if a fundraising dinner and/or party will be held and come up with a loose plan for this (potential artists, locations, venues, etc.) November
Follow up with visual artists and decide on a t-shirt design
Follow up on lodging and building reservations
Follow up with women for their attendance
Follow up with potential workshop leaders and solidify those who will present
Follow up with support people
Decide if support people will receive any kind of compensation
Send out an email blast to all interested parties and organizations.
Begin working on the registration packet
Finalize who the retreat sponsors will be
Finalize the sponsorship packet
Work on fundraising dinner and party: pick a date (March), book the artists, reserve the venue, and begin developing a flyer, a poster, and a press release
Find a t-shirt company to do retreat t-shirts

December

Finish the registration packet
Determine what the retreat schedule will be
Determine transportation logistics
Continue following up with support people
Identify potential artists to perform at the retreat
Identify potential films to view
Send out a press release to all appropriate list serves, organizations and media outlets
Finalize those women who will be coming to the retreat
Send out the sponsorship packet to sponsors
Work on fundraising dinner promotion and invitations
Follow up with building and lodging to make sure everything has been processed
Follow up on t-shirts

January

Send out the registration packets to the invitees
Finalize the retreat schedule
Follow up with artists and films for fees, coordination, and liabilities
Finalize accommodations, transportation, and food logistics
Send out another email blast to all appropriate persons and organizations on the progress made toward the retreat
Send out invitations to the fundraising dinner
- Finalize who the retreat support people will be
- Follow up with sponsors to see if they have any questions
- Make sure building and lodging arrangements have been finalized
- Follow up with workshop leaders
- Make t-shirt order

**February**

- Send out the retreat schedule to the invitees.
- Make sure everything is in place for the artists and films
- Send out retreat update to the Hip Hop Congress monthly update and to the Frontline list serve
- Follow up and finalize everything for the fundraising dinner and party
- Send out a press release about the fundraising dinner and party
- Determine a schedule for the retreat support people
- Follow up on t-shirt order

**March**

- Hold the fundraising dinner and party
- Follow up with the invitees to see if they have any questions or concerns
- Double check on the building and lodging reservations
- Send out another press release about the retreat
- Follow up with artists and workshop leaders to confirm their attendance and what supplies and equipment they need
- Send out an email to invitees about the progress that has been made about the retreat
- Create a supply list for registration and goodie bags
- Make sure t-shirt order is almost completed

**April**

- Follow up with sponsors
- Send a reminder email to invitees
- Buy supplies needed for workshops
- Buy supplies for registration and goodie bags
- Come up with a detailed plan for the entire retreat (where volunteers and support people should be, prep times for registration, workshops, and performances, participant arrival and departure times, etc.)
- Pick up the t-shirts
May

- Go over detailed plan
- Send out email blast
- Notify local press about the retreat, send another copy of press release
- Follow up with attendees, support people, workshop leaders, and performers
- Put together entrance registration packets
- Put together goodie bags
- Double check retreat lodging and building reservations
- Make signs to direct people to registration
- Put together box of registration supplies
- Make a box of supplies for every workshop
- Secure sound equipment
- **WOMEN IN HIP HOP RETREAT HAPPENS IN MAY OR JUNE!!!**

July

- Debrief on what went well and what can be done better for next year
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