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RAP MUSIC AND HEGEMONY:
A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF RAP'S NARRATIVES

By

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B.A., University of Louisville, 2004

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2006

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By

Jamar Montez Wheeler

A Thesis Approved on

April 7, 2006

By the following Thesis Committee:

Chair (Jon Rieger)

Clarence Talley

Dennis Hall

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the memories of Tupac Amaru Shakur and Christopher “Biggie Smalls” Wallace. Two of the greatest rappers of all-time, who balanced commercial success with speaking the truth about the conditions of the ghetto in ways that were artistically brilliant. May their souls find peace and may the Hip Hop community judge the rappers of today by this standard.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God, first and foremost, because without Him I am nothing. I would also like to thank Dr. Jon Rieger for sharing this vision with me and for keeping me in line methodologically. Without his assistance this thesis would be nowhere no near as sound. I would like to thank Dr. Clarence Talley for his valuable advice and guidance not only for this project, but during these two trying years. I appreciate your honesty and frankness, I will take the lessons learned from you with me throughout my academic career. Next, I would like to thank Dr. Dennis Hall for his willingness to serve on this committee at such short notice. Finally, I would like to thank Matthew Real for his participation in this project and his thoughtful comments. Thank you all.

ABSTRACT

RAP MUSIC AND HEGEMONY: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF RAP'S NARRATIVES

Jamar Montez Wheeler

May 14, 2006

This thesis is a historical analysis of the narratives of rap music and their relationship to hegemony. I view the trends outlined in this thesis as a microcosm of large-scale social trends in the world of popular culture. A world dominated and distributed by a small collection of huge media conglomerates. The central questions of this thesis are “has rap music’s relationship to hegemony changed?” and if so, “how has it changed?” After collecting my data using random sampling techniques and analyzing it utilizing verifiable statistical tests, I answer these two questions. The evidence supports the conclusion that rap music’s relationship to hegemony has changed and this change is curvilinear, meaning that in the beginning (1984 - 1990) rap’s counter-hegemonic value was low and this value grew in the middle years (1992 - 1998), only to fall to its lowest point in today’s time, beginning at the start of the new millennium (2000 - 2004).

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of the most common mistakes that is made when lay people discuss Hip Hop is confusing it with rap music, which is an element of Hip Hop. Rap, along with deejaying, break-dancing, and graffiti, are the four elements that comprise the cultural reality that is Hip Hop. Hip Hop is a culture, a way of life, a way of looking at the world, whereas rap music is a cultural practice that has emerged from the cultural landscape of Hip Hop. Because rap music is Hip Hop's most visible element and the element most suited for the purposes of exchange within the global marketplace, it is the one that is the most talked about in the general public and within academia (Rose 1994). Although there is some disagreement within the rap literature about the origins of rap music, I conclude that the best way to trace rap's beginnings is to locate it within the larger context of Hip Hop culture.

There is a general consensus within the social science literature that a political-economic shift occurred during the 1970s. This shift is characterized by the "liberalization" of market forces from constraints imposed by nation-states, such as the taxation necessary to fund social programs. Some of the most targeted social programs were those that sought to redistribute the wealth gained through capitalistic enterprises that were tied to American soil. The success of these initiatives and the subsequent economic and social restructuring that followed had major consequences for the urban

localities of the United States. Cities across the United States began to lose federal funding for social services, and if you couple this trend with a shrinking job market for those who were unskilled, the situation was bleak for the poorest among the U.S. citizenry (Rose 1994). When this trend is applied to New York City, this meant trouble for the Black and Latino communities that were already adversely affected by historical racism.

An event that should be seen as a microcosm of the large-scale changes that were happening at this time can be credited as one of the main instigators of the Hip Hop movement. The well-known urban planner Robert Moses had a dream. His dream was to build an expressway that would connect New Jersey to Long Island, New York, which is a typical example of an initiative designed to benefit the wealthy to the disadvantage of the poor (Rose 1994). Moses apparently had the option of modifying his route so that working-class neighborhoods would be bypassed, but he chose instead to go full steam ahead and this meant the demolition of hundreds of residential and commercial buildings (Rose 1994:31). The aftermath of this project was white flight, landlords anxiously selling their property, destruction, abandoned buildings, and the forced relocation of thousands of residents (Rose 1994). The youth still living in the South Bronx, depicted as hopeless, began to build cultural networks and develop alternative styles of living. These Afro-Caribbean, African-American, and Latino youth developed a distinctive set of artistic practices that coalesced to form Hip Hop (Rose 1994). They challenged, through artistic means, the cultural assumptions of postindustrial America by reaffirming themselves as creative individuals. Their social position placed them in the category of those Americans known as the working and non-working poor, but through Hip Hop they

were able to craft identities that reaffirmed their sense of humanness in the face of marginalization.

Central to the development of Hip Hop culture and the formation of alternative identities was affiliating oneself with a “crew”. These crews claimed a specific turf and would strengthen the bonds between members by engaging in activities like wearing similar clothing, spraying graffiti together and going to local parties which featured DJs such as DJ Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash (Rose 1994). Most of these crews had specific names that also served the important purpose of reaffirmation and sometimes members would take nicknames that would fictively elevate their status. As this process began to build momentum a distinct culture was starting to emerge. The youth who were immersed in this culture took what was available from the technologically advanced mainstream society and used their hearts and minds to make something new out of something that middle-class America would consider old.

A spirit of innovation seemed to pervade the youth that were the inaugurators of Hip Hop. The most important innovation was the way in which the DJ would use the turntable. Whenever a Hip Hop event was held the DJ was the star of the show (Rose 1994). Even though each Hip Hop event would feature break-dancing, graffiti, and deejaying, breakdancers couldn’t dance without a beat and the graffiti writers needed background music, so the DJ was at the center of each show (Rose 1994). Pretty soon, a few DJs took advantage of this and began to develop innovative styles while practicing their craft. The most outstanding example of this is Grandmaster Flash. Grandmaster Flash was the DJ who perfected the art of scratching. Scratching is a turntable technique that involves playing a record back and forth with your hand by scratching the needle

against the groove of the record and then along with the groove of the record (Rose 1994:53). Most of the time two turntables were being used, so this meant that while the DJ was scratching one record he would be either in rhythm or purposefully against the rhythm of the record to create distinct sound effects. This innovation began to draw large crowds and eventually DJs thought it would be best that they share the spotlight, since the crowds began to watch them instead of dance. So, in response to this the DJs began to call rappers on stage to serve as MCs of these popular events (Rose 1994).

Rappers would get on stage and rhyme about how great they were, how great the DJ was and then they would tell stories, lyrically disrespect other rappers, or speak on social issues. The thing to keep in mind is that in the very beginning rapping was all about keeping the crowd's attention. If you were good at that, you would succeed; if not, you would fail. As for the debate mentioned earlier, Rose (1994) sees rap music as emerging from Hip Hop for the simple fact that rappers had to integrate technology into their oral performances and to be considered a good rapper they had to be able to rhyme rhythmically with the beat, a lot of the time without having the opportunity to sit down and think about it. The microphone is to the rapper what the turntable is to the DJ. The microphone is a rapper's best friend because it gives the rapper the power to reach his audience in ways that his own voice can't (Rose 1994). As rap music evolved, the DJ became less of a factor and the rapper became more of a factor, yet and still the relationship remains strong to this day, even though the DJ has been replaced by the rap producer for the most part.

Rapping, as a cultural practice rooted in Hip Hop, includes rhymed narratives accompanied by electronically-based music that is usually produced in a recording studio

(Rose 1994). These narratives are usually characterized by boasting, toasting, and signifying, which are linguistic innovations that are central to Black culture and precede rap. Toasting is the act of paying homage to one's crew, oneself, or someone that the rapper admires. Signifying is the act of taking something unrelated to human experience and relating it back to either the rapper or someone else. The most well-known example of signifying was Muhammad Ali's adage, "I float like a butterfly, sting like a bee." It is clear that he cannot fly, nor sting like a bee, but is using these insects to signify his physical prowess as a boxer (Perkins 1996). All of these methods combine to form a cultural expression that gives priority to Black voices and articulates the pleasures, pains, and problems of Black urban life (Rose 1994).

Although it is clear that rap music emerged within the context of Hip Hop, what is not so clear is where the origins of the orality in rap can be located. One scholar believes that the orality in rap can be traced to ancient Africa, whereas other scholars trace it to more recent times, such as the spoken word texts of the Last Poets, which were heavily influenced by the Black Power Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Kopano 2002; Perkins 1996). Tricia Rose (1994), the most influential scholar when it comes to analyzing rap, locates rap's orality anywhere from the 1950s radio disc jockeys who spoke in a Black vernacular to the pimp narratives of Iceberg Slim. William Eric Perkins (1996) believes that Cab Calloway is not given enough credit for his contribution to rap via his "jive scat" routine. Overall, the orality of rap in the beginning drew from various oral traditions that are distinctly African-American, the cultural imperatives of Hip Hop, and at the same time from the marginalized conditions that frame the lives of rappers and the communities they represent.

The fact that Hip Hop developed from a collection of actors that were marginalized by the economic restructuring of the late 1970s and early 1980s would seem to naturally place it, as a cultural form, at odds with the mainstream society. So, if rap music remains true to its Hip Hop roots, the music should reflect the concerns, hopes, despair, and ideology of those residing in the marginalized inner-city communities of America. This thesis addresses the questions of whether rap music's relationship to hegemony has changed over time and, if so, how it has changed. I chose to focus on hegemony and rap music because reason dictates that the ideology of the Hip Hop community and the ideology broadcast to us by the dominant elites of American society differ in certain fundamental ways. The cultural imperative of those in the Hip Hop community is to challenge the cultural assumptions of mainstream American society through artistic expression, and therefore, reaffirm their sense of humanness. The cultural imperative of the dominant elites is to stabilize society through ideologies that seek to legitimize the social structure or change it through the systematic assertion of cultural norms and values that serve the interests of the socially, politically, and economically powerful.

The focus of this thesis is rap music, but the subject matter has much greater implications in regards to large-scale social trends. For example, if rap music has changed over time and this change reflects an erosion of the critical elements of rap music, this trend may also hold true for the news media or other art forms such as motion pictures. The importance of these central questions hinges on what they will reveal about the nature of cultural production and this will also give us insights as to whether cultural products that may be in opposition to the dominant ideology permeating U.S. society can

survive and thrive in the mainstream consumer market. If you consider the fact that these cultural products are for the most part created by young Black males, who are among those most adversely affected by economic restructuring, it adds an interesting dynamic. Have these rappers remained true to those they represent in the ghetto, or have they sought to cash in on their talent with little regard for making music that gives affirmation to those surviving in the concrete jungle? My thesis seeks not to explain why rap music has developed in this or that fashion - I merely seek to explain how it actually is.

Unlike most of the literature that has attempted to say something of value about rap music, I will not rely on a few isolated cultural products to produce a theory of what rap is, or what rap represents. Instead I will employ random sampling techniques to collect the music that I will analyze and I will employ analytic techniques that are systematic in nature in order to answer my central questions about rap music's relationship to hegemony. This work will provide a much-needed scientific contribution to the literature on rap, mainly because it relies on the use of systematic analytical techniques. Thus far, it seems most scholars have *talked* about rap, but have not done the systematic research necessary to back up their speculative insights.

CHAPTER TWO

HEGEMONY AND IDEOLOGY

We always had the oppressor wanting to call our women bitches, but we always fought against it, we didn't spread it. If they called us niggers, we always fought against it, we didn't perpetuate it. Now were getting paid to say that which we've always fought against.

- Rev. Jesse Jackson; talking about gangsta rap in a recorded interview (Long and Hutchinson 2001)

Rap music is viewed by the majority of scholars that have written about it as a counter-hegemonic voice. This means that the narratives that form the basis of rap music do not affirm the dominant ideology, instead these narratives dispute, question, and deconstruct the dominant ideology. Although there are some peripheral scholars who do not believe that rap has any significant counter-hegemonic elements, the core debate within the rap literature hinges not on the existence of counter-hegemonic elements, but on the overall coherence, scale, and revolutionary potential of the counter-hegemonic narratives associated with rap. Even though the relationship between hegemony and rap music has been touched upon in the rap literature, the major weakness that can be seen throughout the literature is the lack of a comprehensive treatment of hegemony. Therefore, it can be assumed that when scholars within the rap literature speak on hegemony they are utilizing the most widely used definition of hegemony, which is a form of domination achieved by constructing an ideological consensus. Constructing an ideological consensus means to successfully convince the masses that an ideology

articulated within a social discourse represents social reality. In order to truly appreciate rap music's relationship to hegemony we must go a step further and confront this common sense notion of hegemony.

The first step that needs to be taken in properly conceptualizing hegemony is differentiating it from ideology. In reference to the literature, I assert that hegemony consists of, but is not limited to, a particular set of ideologies. These ideologies are those that have achieved a position of dominance in the arena of social discourse. Admittedly, some scholars believe that the best way to think of ideology is to see it as the "signification of ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group", but this limits the conceptual power of ideology by prematurely relegating subordinate groups to a position of voicelessness (Eagleton 1991:30). According to Karl Mannheim, ideology is best conceived as the totality of opinions, statements, propositions, and systems of ideas that are derived from the life-situation of the social groups who express these sentiments (Mannheim 1936). In contrast to the former conception of ideology, this view of ideology does not presuppose that the construction of an ideology is reserved for the dominant elites, it makes room for a diversity of ideologies that may or may not oppose the ideology of the dominant group.

Building from Mannheim's conception, the most useful definition of ideology is one that sees it as the systematic articulation of sentiments that promote and legitimate the interests of particular social groups in the face of opposing interests; these interests being related to the sustenance or the deconstruction of a whole form of political life (Eagleton 1991: 29). This means that several groups within a society have the capacity to articulate an ideology that may support or seek to dismantle the social structure as it is.

An example of this dynamic is the fact those engaged in the Feminist Movement and the Civil Rights Movement actively constructed ideologies that were in opposition to the ideologies that sought to support the U.S. social structure at the time. Again, the fundamental difference between the concept of ideology and the concept of hegemony is that ideology consists of the systematic articulation of the ideas, beliefs, and propositions of a particular social group, whereas hegemony consists of particular ideologies that seek to naturalize the position of the dominant group. In other words, there is a diversity of social groups that articulate ideologies that may be in opposition to another group's ideology, but when it comes to hegemony the concern shifts to a particular set of ideologies that are linked to the ruling elite. In a nutshell, the concept of hegemony incorporates the concept of ideology, but does so in a way that makes it specific to a particular social group.

Antonio Gramsci, the neo-Marxist scholar who first elaborated a theory of hegemony, claimed that hegemony describes "the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates" (Eagleton 1991:112). Although ideology is central to the concept of hegemony, it is important to note that hegemony transcends ideology. This means that hegemony is also a useful term to describe those successful strategies in which the ruling class secures consent from the populace through means that aren't ideological (Eagleton 1991). With that said, my main concern is the ideological implications of hegemony. Gramsci associates hegemony with civil society, and asserts that the ruling class uses *hegemonic apparatuses* to bind the general populace to their ideology, these apparatuses make the general population more susceptible to accepting the rule of the dominant group. Some prime examples of hegemonic apparatuses would

be television stations, radio stations, religious institutions, newspapers, and schools (Eagleton 1991). Overall, Gramsci asserts that establishing a hegemonic relationship means establishing moral, political, and intellectual leadership in social life by diffusing one's own worldview throughout the fabric of society as a whole (Eagleton 1991:116). As a consequence, the interests of the dominant group become the interests of society at large (Eagleton 1991).

Three contemporary treatments of hegemony will now be elaborated upon and this discussion will conclude with the definition of hegemony that is the most descriptive of the process that engenders this form of domination. The first treatment describes hegemony as a form of class rule facilitated by the power inequities that result from the social relations of production. It is an 'opinion-molding activity' that filters through structures of society, economy, culture, gender, ethnicity, class and ideology (Bieler and Morton 2004:87). The second treatment focuses on the content of hegemony in America and how the permanence of hegemony reflects itself in the life of the individual and society. From this perspective, hegemony is viewed as a form of systematic oppression that insinuates itself into the lives of individuals to the point that these individuals do not regard themselves as worthwhile beings and subsequently base their worth on mimicking the dominant group (Jones 2001:39). The last treatment of hegemony totally rejects it in its traditional conceptual form and instead points out that what most scholars call hegemony should be identified as the *public transcript*. This perspective implies that there is a *hidden transcript* beyond the ideological control of the dominant group and the existence of this *hidden transcript* problematizes any notion of hegemony that has an ideological consensus as its basis (Scott 1990).

First of all, according to neo-Gramscian scholars Bieler and Morton (2004), hegemony's point of origin is within "social forces" that are engendered by the social relations of production. By "social forces" is meant the main collection of actors that operate within and across all spheres of hegemonic activity; these spheres being the social relations of production, forms of state, and world orders (Bieler and Morton 2004). These spheres of activity can be seen as stages in a process in which a hegemonic discourse builds momentum. The process begins when there is a change in the social relations of production and this change is accompanied by the mobilization of a collection of actors seeking to transform the state into an entity that is accommodating to their objectives. If this mobilization is successful at the national level, or the *forms of state* sphere, these same social forces will seek to transcend their national context and expand outwardly to influence the world order (Bieler and Morton 2004).

These dynamics can be sensed in this age of globalization if consideration is given to what forces gave rise to the economic restructuring that spanned the whole globe. From the end of World War II to the 1970s, the social relations of production were organized around the Fordist accumulation regime, which was based upon mass production and mass consumption (Bieler and Morton 2004). A fundamental change occurred during the economic crisis of the 1970s and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates and this change is attributed to the internationalization of both production and the nation-state (Bieler and Morton 2004). All these trends have given rise to a 'transnational managerial class' that direct the transnational corporations at the apex of the new global economy (Bieler and Morton 2004). According to Bieler and Morton (2004), the internationalization of the nation-

state does not signify the retreat of the nation-state in regards to social power, it signifies a change in public policy that reflects the *perceived* need for nation-states to accommodate the needs of transnational capital accumulation. As a result, it is argued that the nation-state became a transmission belt for neo-liberal ideology and the logic of capitalist competition from global to local spheres (Bieler and Morton 2004:96).

From this perspective, it can be gleaned that hegemony is more than domination through the construction of an ideological consensus. Bieler and Morton (2004) link the roots of any hegemonic project to the social relations of production. The collection of actors that have an elite position with this sphere of activity seek to exert their dominance across the other main spheres of activity. The first obstacle is asserting their ideological position at the national level and if this project is successful, a collective mobilization will seek to assert their ideological position at the global level. In other words, hegemony should be conceptualized as a process through which dominant elites seek to naturalize their position not only ideologically, but also through public policy channels and culture.

It is most relevant for my purposes to consider how the corporate firms that distribute rap music fit into this schematic developed by Bieler and Morton. One of the major trends of the last decade that has attracted increasing amounts of attention from social scientists is the scale of media consolidation. According to Ben Bagdikian (1983; 2000), author of *Media Monopoly*, in 1983 fifty firms dominated the mass media; by the year 2000, this number fell below ten (Du Boff and Herman 2001:25). These new media conglomerates own all major film studios, television networks, and recorded music companies. They also own most cable channels and book publishers (Du Boff and

Herman 2001). Most scholars believe that consolidation at this scale has an adverse effect on competition and they also posit that these media firms have formed strategic alliances to protect their position in the market (Du Boff and Herman 2001; Champlin and Knoedler 2002).

If we input these trends into the Bieler-Morton schematic, we would find that the collection of actors that have the most power at the companies that distribute rap and other cultural products would have to be the corporate managers of these media conglomerates. This dynamic falls into the social relations of production sphere, because these media firms produce cultural products such as television shows, movies, and CDs. Although this may not be a completely linear process, for the sake of brevity it can be gleaned that once this collection of actors have consolidated power within the social relations of production realm they would seek to influence public policy, specifically through government entities such as the Federal Communications Commission. This mobilization may seek to loosen the constraints placed upon the media/communications industry by anti-trust laws. If such a mobilization is successful, this same collective may seek to influence similar international entities for the sake of maintaining a competitive edge globally. If these mobilizations are successful across all spheres of activity, the consequence is a situation of global hegemony, which means that the inter-subjective sentiments of a few actors will have the material and institutional capacity to reach the vast majority of the world's population (Bieler and Morton 2004). Even though this is a merely an example, it clearly mirrors various trends at the present time.

Overall, this perspective on hegemony asserts the class nature of hegemony and offers us a definitive outlook that takes into account the ability of the dominant elites' to

use flexibility when faced with a dilemma such as the economic decline of the 1970s. The authors believe that hegemonic articulations are rooted in the social relations of production and the power associated with being in the elite group within this sphere of activity. Such persons would include CEOs, influential stockholders, and members of the board of directors in transnational corporations. They represent the collection of actors that have the capacity to mobilize their resources and social power, and affect the public policy of a given nation-state. More often than not, this collection of actors will not stop at the national level and will seek to consolidate power on a global level. The hegemonic articulations associated with this powerful collective are filtered through society by way of the education system, public policy, and the mass media to name a few areas (Bieler and Morton 2004).

The major shortcoming of this perspective on hegemony is the unbalanced focus on macro structures. If the logic of this perspective is followed, it is as if the dominant elites do this and do that and the rest of humanity simply falls in line and plays obedient roles. In other words, such a perspective does not account for the resistance to these major trends and it is almost condescending to those individuals who do not hold an elite position in society. Although this perspective goes into greater detail about the nature of hegemony and how dominance is maintained through hegemony, the basic premise remains that this dominance is maintained through an ideological consensus. The only difference between this perspective and perspectives that assert that hegemony is a form of domination sustained by an ideological consensus is the fact that Bieler and Morton provide us with better analytic tools to uncover the social forces behind the hegemonic articulations that are filtered through society. They fail to question whether

hegemony is domination maintained through a manufactured ideological consensus or if its something different entirely. Ultimately, the focus of their article was not the nature of hegemony, but rather the social forces that engender hegemony and use this form of domination to consolidate social power.

The next piece goes a bit further in elaborating the nature of hegemony and the effects of a situation of *permanent hegemony*. According to Jones (2001), the content of American hegemony is the philosophy of liberalism. He goes on to argue that although there is a two party system in America, and subscribers to the parties may be regarded as conservatives and liberals, both parties debate within a single ideological frame, which is liberalism (Jones 2001; Susser 1995:58). Some of the major characteristics of this philosophy include the focus on individualism, the rhetoric of equal opportunity, the acceptance of extreme income inequality, and the logic of competition (Jones 2001). Therefore, for any discourse to be considered counter-hegemonic, it must call these characteristics of liberal ideology into question.

One of the distinguishing aspects of this article is the way that it differentiates *temporary hegemony* from *permanent hegemony*. Jones (2001), citing Antonio Gramsci, explains that *permanent* hegemony is always bad, but *temporary* hegemony of one group over another may be beneficial if the leadership seeks to reach a noble end. In other words, *temporary* hegemony implies a difference in power, but it does not imply domination over others (Jones 2001). *Permanent* hegemony in a socio-political space is harmful, because once it is established and maintained effectively the ideas of the controlling class insinuate themselves into the lives of the oppressed to the point that subjugated people eventually do not regard themselves as worthwhile beings and

consequently, base their worth on how well they can mimic the behavior of the dominant group (Jones 2001:39). So, a situation of *permanent* hegemony is one in which there are not only differences in social power, but domination over others as well. In America, a situation of *permanent* hegemony would lead to collective obsessions with material gain, image, power and gross consumerism (Jones 2001:39). Ultimately, this perspective suggests that *permanent* hegemony is a social reality within America, and the content of *permanent* hegemony is the philosophy of liberalism, which serves as the main apologia for capitalism.

This article runs into the same issues as the previous one, the failure to appreciate the human agency of the oppressed. It is difficult to discern whether these tendencies are a theoretical problem within the literature, or if these two articles should be seen as isolated exceptions to other theoretical approaches to hegemony. Again, the major thrust of the scholar's argument is more similar to common sense notions of hegemony than it is different. Jones (2001) assumes that this situation of *permanent* hegemony is one in which the majority of Americans are being "duped" by the dominant elites into passively accepting their worldview along with the consequences that come with acquiescing to power, despite the fact that such a move is dehumanizing and places them in a disadvantaged position. These perspectives and the rest of those whose roots lie in the common sense notion of hegemony fail to account for resistance movements of all sorts, and the vitality of these and other social movements that seek institutional change. At this point, we must turn to a clear alternative, one that questions the very existence of hegemony.

James Scott, in his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), outlines a

theory that rejects hegemony, especially when it comes to the common sense notion of hegemony. This stinging critique of theories of hegemony has at its basis four major points. First, Scott (1990) argues that subordinate groups have never been ideologically incorporated to the extent proposed by theorists of hegemony. Secondly, he asserts that there is no reason to believe that the broad-based acceptance of the ruling ethos prevents social conflict (Scott 1990). Thirdly, he says that social scientists give the notion of hegemony so much weight because of the apparent social scientific reliance on the *public transcript*, which obscures the fact that a *hidden transcript* exists and this *hidden transcript* contains the voice of resistance and serves as the theoretical basis of revolutionary movements. And lastly, Scott (1990) believes that theories of hegemony fail to account for resistance movements and counter ideologies that seek out alternatives to the prevailing order against incredible odds. Some examples are the various slave insurrections and the various movements that sought to overturn such long-standing institutions such as serfdom and feudalism.

These four points suggest that it is not the subordinate groups being “duped”, it’s the social scientists. First of all, Scott’s rejection of hegemony as domination sustained by an ideological consensus stems from the first two points outlined in the preceding paragraph, these points being that subordinate groups have never been ideologically incorporated as much as scholars of hegemony assert and his belief that the broad-based acceptance of dominant ideologies has little to do with the prevention of social conflict. Scott (1990) finds no evidence that the dominant ideology has incorporated the masses, and he posits that even if this supposed incorporation were true, it may lead to more social conflict, not less. He maintains such a position because he believes that if

someone takes the dominant ideology lightly and pays very little attention to it, they will go about their lives without much of a fuss. On the other hand, if someone takes a hegemonic articulation such as equal opportunity to heart and their life circumstances suggest that this is a mere slogan, someone is going to have hell to pay for this transgression (Scott 1990). Therefore, he asserts that the dominant elites would have more worries instead of less if the supposed ideological incorporation of subordinate groups worked to the extent proposed by hegemony theorists. Speaking to his first point, Scott (1990) suggests that the power of the dominant ideology doesn't lie in its ability to convince others of its validity, but in its ability to naturalize power relations.

The foundational premise of *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* is the existence of two distinct discourses, the *public transcript* and the *hidden transcript* (Scott 1990). Scott believes that social scientists assert the existence of hegemony because they rely too heavily on the *public transcript*, which he describes as the “official transcript” in other places. He goes on to describe the *public transcript* as a social discourse, which, “by its accommodationist tone, provides convincing evidence for the hegemony of the dominant discourse. It is in the public domain where the effects of power relations are most manifest, and any analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic partners in their subordination. (Scott 1990:4)” In other words, if social scientists rely on social institutions such as the educational system, the economic system, the mass media, and the like, they will easily find evidence of hegemony. The failure lies in the inability of social scientists to give an equal amount of attention to *hidden transcripts*, which Scott (1990:4) describes as “discourses that take place ‘offstage,’

beyond direct observation by powerholders.” The logic behind this theory derives from a sensibility that asserts that the dominant elites have the social power and resources to create and manage a *public transcript* that affirms their values and legitimizes their social power, but this ideological power is not absolute and this fact can be discerned because of the existence and relative autonomy of *hidden transcripts* that directly challenge and oppose the *public transcript*.

Scott’s (1990) last point, and arguably the most powerful he makes in rejecting hegemony, asserts the fact that in the face of incredible odds certain resistance movements have risen up and these movements have had as their basis potent *hidden transcripts*. He also makes the point that a lot of resistance movements came in response to unmet promises that were systematically promoted by the dominant ideology (Scott 1990). He gives the French and Bolshevik Revolutions as examples of instances in which a mass of people rose up after demanding what they felt was their just due since the dominant ideology said it was within their reach (Scott 1990). Overall, Scott maintains a position that rejects hegemony as we know it and claims that what many social scientists see as a hegemonic discourse is in reality the *public transcript* in action. The purpose of the *public transcript* is to present a façade to the general public that naturalizes power relations and at the same time veils the true intentions of the dominant elites, these intentions make up their *hidden transcript* (Scott 1990). At the same time, subordinate groups play along and seem to accept their subordinate status with levity when they are called upon to give their input within the forum of the *public transcript* (Scott 1990). Similar to Erving Goffman’s Dramaturgical theory, Scott believes that both the dominant elites and the subordinate groups operate on the front stage (*public*

transcript) and the backstage (*hidden transcript*).

I share James Scott's skepticism of hegemony as a form of domination through the construction of an ideological consensus, but unlike Scott, I assert that hegemony does in fact exist. Although Scott eloquently points out some major holes in the mainstream theories of hegemony that posit an ideological consensus as its base, a theoretical position that totally rejects the social reality and power of hegemony is one that is erroneous. In order to formulate a more accurate conception of hegemony I will critique the last two points presented by Scott. First of all, the mere existence of *hidden transcripts* does not equate to the non-existence of hegemony as a coercive force in our daily lives. It is quite plausible, that oppressed peoples do not ascribe to the same values of the dominant group and may find such a possibility to be contemptible. However, the fact that such contempt for the dominant group and their values is unarticulated is an expression of the ideological power of hegemony. If a social discourse has the ideological power to render the vast majority of people silent, even if such silence only takes place within the *public transcript*, it is a reflection of domination.

Furthermore, we live in a society that is increasingly mechanized and this mechanization has produced a social reality in which there is less time and space to actively construct and sustain what could be known as a *hidden transcript*. In laying out his argument, Scott based a lot of his points on historical occurrences that took place within the contexts of situations that do not fit present circumstances. For example, he draws a lot of his conclusions from the historical contexts of slavery, feudalism and serfdom. All three could be classified as situations in which dominant ideologies played at most, a secondary role in regards to the maintenance of social power. The main

strategy used in consolidating power in those days were a lot more overt and directly coercive, to put it lightly, especially when it comes to slavery. It could be gleaned that the resistance movements linked to these periods in history had less to do with the construction of *hidden transcripts* to counter the dominant, *public transcript* and more to do with escaping a desperate situation. In other words, the sense that one was living within oppressive circumstances was a lot more palpable and there was nothing that the dominant group could say to convince you otherwise. In these days of late capitalism, the context under which resistance can be mobilized and sustained is totally different due to the social fragmentation associated with race, class, ethnicity, gender, political ideology, religion, and urban location. This fragmentation adversely affects the possibility of a collection of actors producing and sustaining a *hidden transcript* that in any way poses a threat to the *public transcript*, for the simple fact that a fragmented populace will produce a variety of *hidden transcripts* that will more than likely only sustain a resonance within a particular, circumscribed social group. Slaves could readily identify with other slaves and serfs could identify with other serfs, but the social fragmentation characteristic of today's society prevents this collective sense that your enemy is my enemy. Therefore, *hidden transcripts* may exist today, but what is the significance of *hidden transcripts* when the only thing that unifies this fragmented collective of subordinate group members is the *public transcript*. Tyrone from the projects and Jacob from a poor, white community can both access MTV, but when it comes to the *hidden transcripts* that each may have been introduced to, they will remain in the dark.

Finally, Scott made the point that theories of hegemony fail to account for

resistance movements and *hidden transcripts* that developed in the face of extreme odds against such a mobilization. Again, I assert the fact that these collective mobilizations against all odds had less to do with the non-existence of hegemonic power reflected in the potency of the *hidden transcript* of the oppressed groups and a lot more to do with these oppressed people trying to find a way out of a desperate situation by any means. The groups that Scott discusses in his book all have one thing in common, and that is the sense that they had very little to lose when it came to resisting their oppressive circumstances and a *hidden transcript* was not a prerequisite for finding this out. Plus, Scott fails to acknowledge that these instances in which oppressed groups rise up and directly challenge their oppressors are very rare. This overwhelming fact is easily discerned because these occurrences are known as revolutions.

Ultimately, the problem with prior approaches of hegemony is the extent upon which these theories have implied that the basis of hegemony is an ideological consensus. Such theories do not adequately account for the human agency of subordinate groups. In other words, the human agency of the dominant elites is over represented whereas the human agency of the less powerful is underrepresented. James Scott (1990) does a good job of showing how the ideological domination the comprises hegemony has more to do with the material and institutional resources of the dominant group and less to do with the dominant group's ability to manipulate the public into passively accepting their ideology. On the other hand, Scott's assertion that hegemony doesn't exist is far fetched given the fact that he relies on situations (feudalism, slavery, and serfdom) in which coercive power was the standard to argue against the existence of a social reality that came into being because of the inherent limitations of coercive power and the perceived need of the

dominant group to maintain their dominance through means that were ideological in nature. Theoretical conceptions of hegemony that imply that an ideological consensus lies at its basis must be refined. In this spirit I contend that the most useful theory of hegemony is one that places emphasis upon the capacity of the dominant group to draw up material, institutional, and political resources to systematically articulate ideologies that serve their interest and at the same time repel competing ideologies.

Hegemony Revised

Hegemony refers to dominant ideologies whose preponderance is reflected in their ability to make it seem as if the linear trajectory of human affairs and the resulting social structure is an inevitable reality. This definition does not assume that the general public has to believe that the dominant ideologies that comprise hegemony represent an objective account of social reality to have a situation of hegemony. The only thing that is necessary is the systematic articulation of inter-subjective sentiments, whose subjectiveness is veiled and presented as objective facts. For example, individuals who are in a disadvantaged position within the social order may not like the fact that they cannot obtain a higher standard living, but more often than not they will grin and bear it. They will not use their angst and disappointment to mobilize like-minded individuals in attempts to transform the American political economy. This dynamic reflects both the rational and relatively powerless side of the individual. The rational side may question the dominant ideology and come to the conclusion that it falsely represents lived experience, but the powerless side knows that the odds of him changing the situation,

even in concert with others, is stacked heavily against him.

The ideological power of hegemony, according to my definition, is the fact that it is a social force that seeks to transform the realm of the possible into a fixed reality. In other words, hegemony in this sense is characterized by ideologies that are presented as if they are beyond debate. In relation to this dynamic, hegemony marginalizes competing ideologies to the extent that the dominant ideology takes the form of common sense. The ideologies articulated within the context of human possibility become truth statements that explain how the world works and how it should operate in the future. A prime example of such statements is the often repeated idea that market forces transcend human agency and therefore to interfere with these seemingly metaphysical forces is to beget societal harm. By far the most compelling and least questioned aspect of American society is the political economy on which it operates. Although there are several political economies to choose from and presumably thousands more to be discovered in the future, the combination of the philosophy of liberalism and capitalism is so embedded into our collective psyche that to visualize an alternative is difficult, no matter how radical one may be in his thinking. Even if one is able to visualize an alternative and articulate it in a well-meaning, eloquent style, chances are this poor soul would be marginalized to the point that his sanity would be questioned.

Overall, hegemony in its pure form represents the ability of the ruling elite to dominate social discourse through the monopolization of truth claims. This monopolization is sustained by vast material, institutional, and political resources and can be identified by its ability to systematically articulate the inter-subjective sentiments of the dominant group through various channels or *hegemonic apparatuses* as Gramsci

would call them (Eagleton 1991). Once these inter-subjective sentiments take on the appearance of truth claims, they transform realms of possibility into fixed realities and at the same time present alternative truth claims as insane, hostile, or dangerous; and in some cases these alternative truth claims are rendered invisible.

CHAPTER THREE

TRENDS IN THE RAP LITERATURE

Sometimes it is wiser to analyze your enemy very carefully before you play into their hands.

- Colin Powell; addressing the Vibe Hip Hop Town Meeting (Jones, III 2004)

The scholars who have written on the subject of rap music tend to fall into three categories, those who say that rap music has been appropriated, those who insist that rap music serves as a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance, and those who believe rap music as a counter-hegemonic force has been compromised, but elements of cultural resistance still remain. Out of the articles that I reviewed, 3 out of 31 (12%) believed that rap music has undergone appropriation, 11 out of 31 (42%) felt that rap served as a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance, and 12 out of 31 (46%) thought that rap's counter-hegemonic voice has been compromised, but elements of cultural resistance still exist. Even though these three categories should probably be seen more accurately as stopping points on a continuum rather than mutually exclusive categories, I use these categories to highlight theoretical distinctions that are significant to my study.

Rap has been appropriated

Most of the scholars who believe that rap music has been appropriated focus in on

the images and lyrics associated with gangsta rap and assert that these two features combine to perpetuate stereotypes. Kheven Lee LaGrone (2000) believes that gangsta rap's "nigger gangsta" is the latest in a long series of popular commodities that are packaged and sold to mainstream, White America. From the minstrelsy stage to the present day he says that American popular culture has a fascination with Black culture, a fascination that is satisfied when Blacks are depicted as dumb, lazy, violent, and promiscuous (LaGrone 2000). He goes on to describe the "nigger gangsta" as a young Black male who is rowdy, stupid, infantile, lazy, dirty, undisciplined, drunken, and sexually promiscuous (LaGrone 2000). According to LaGrone (2000), the popularity of this caricature can be attributed to the ability of Whites to define themselves as the polar opposite of what the "nigger" commodity represents and to subsequently view themselves as an authentic American and the "nigger" as un-American.

Another article that falls into this category was based on a study that sought to measure how exposure to violent rap music contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes. Once the experiment was completed, it was found that once exposed to violent rap music both Whites *and* Blacks saw violence as a dispositional trait of Black males in general compared to the control group that was not exposed (Johnson, Trawalter, and Dovodio 2000). Such a belief also had an effect on how the intelligence of Blacks was seen (Johnson, Trawalter, and Dovodio 2000). The gist of the article is the recognition that gangsta rap does perpetuate harmful stereotypes and that these stereotypes affect both Blacks and Whites, meaning that Blacks internalize these stereotypes. The authors believe that this is true because both Blacks and Whites share similar cultural experiences and are both exposed to the priming that occurs when you're

exposed to media programming, such as movies, television, and radio (Johnson, Trawalter, and Dovodio 2000). This article highlights the American tradition of stereotyping marginalized groups through the media. This tradition has adverse effects for subordinate groups and for race relations in general. Even though it is not explicitly stated, the tone of this article suggests that rap music's position within mainstream America is troublesome because of the stereotypes that are perpetuated.

Elizabeth Blair also believes that rap music has been appropriated by the mass culture industries. According to her, rap music has been sanitized by these industries to make it more acceptable to mainstream America (Blair 1993). She believes that the mass culture industries use their power to dominate the development and diffusion of rap music, and the overall significance of this dynamic is the fact that most Americans are only exposed to the life and culture of others outside of their social milieu by way of mass cultural productions (Blair 1993).

The unifying element of these pieces is the lack of agency attributed to the cultural producers of rap. Although rap artists may be active participants in the creation of their music, these authors assert that they are constrained by a popular culture marketplace that sees no profit potential for cultural products that emerge from the Black community unless they reify existing stereotypes. In other words, the mainstream consumers, which means White, middle-class youngsters aren't interested in buying cultural commodities that are resistant to the mainstream culture or cultural products that accurately depict the living conditions and the character of the people that reside there; they want another minstrel-like show that depicts the inner-city community as one that is a conglomeration of violent, lazy, dumb, and promiscuous people that are, ultimately,

deserving of their plight.

The problem with such a perspective is that it ignores the diversity in rap music, refuses to acknowledge the elements of rap music that seek to deconstruct the dominant ideology, and downplays the agency of the cultural producers of rap. According to the rap literature there are at least two distinct genres of rap music, gangsta rap and conscious rap. Gangsta rap emerged from Los Angeles and tends to focus on the cultural environment of the inner-city, which means a lot of the associated narratives focus on violence, drugs, partying, sex, and the combined effects of racial and class marginality. Conscious rap has its roots in New York City and it is characterized by its Afrocentric perspective, its exposition of the hypocrisy of the American ethos, and its exhortations that urge Blacks to acquire knowledge and empower themselves through self-determination (Pinn 1999). Although gangsta rap is the most popular of the two genres, conscious rap has made too much of an impact on the music industry and the consciousness of those that listen to rap music to be brushed off to the side as some sort of anomaly.

Both genres of rap are full of moments when the dominant American ideology has been called into question, especially when it comes to common sense notions of equal opportunity, the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, and the reason behind the continued impoverishment of the Black community living in the inner-city. To make a claim that these themes are rarely dealt with in the music is to display one's ignorance of rap. As my analysis of the literature progresses, I will go deeper into the specifics of the critiques advanced by rappers, but for now I will provide a cursory glance of how most rappers view the above notions that are so prevalent in the discursive currents of

American society. First of all, most rappers would say that equal opportunity is a chimera, used to justify various forms of oppression. For instance, if everyone has been given an equal opportunity no one has an excuse to sell drugs or engage in criminal activity, therefore, the perpetrators need to be punished to the full extent of the law. The Civil Rights Movement is celebrated, but the overall consensus seems to be that it only benefited a handful of Black people, which means that it did not make a huge difference in the lives of the Black masses. Finally, the dominant ideology attributes the continued impoverishment of ghetto residents to a lack of core values, such as an appreciation of hard work, thrift, and delayed gratification. The rap community believes that it is racism, dysfunctional public schools, the lack of good-paying jobs, and the overall environment of the ghetto that should be blamed.

The cultural producers of rap not only make the music, by learning the lessons of their musical forefathers they also actively seek to capitalize off of the fruits of their labor. Like any other musical genre, within rap there are artists who will do anything to sell records and there are also artists who are more concerned about the music and what it represents, with selling records playing an important, but secondary role. I bring this up to dispute the arguments made by those scholars who feel that rap's counter-hegemonic voice has been completely sanitized, which means that rap has been effectively appropriated; with this appropriation manifesting itself through the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes about Black people. It is true that some of the most popular rap artists are those that have very little to say about the conditions of those marginalized communities from which Hip Hop originated and a lot to say about material things, sex, drugs, and other things that make them look foolish, but to say that this represents the

overall state of rap is erroneous. A lot of people and the majority of the scholars, whose theoretical perspectives will be touched on later, do not see an inherent contradiction between selling records and remaining true to Hip Hop, a culture rooted in the expressivity of the racially and economically marginalized youth of New York City.

Another issue that refutes this perspective is the nature of the relationship between the independent rap labels that produce the music, and the mainstream record labels that distribute the music. The fact that the majority of rap music is produced independently alone testifies to the agency of rap's producers. Such independence allows these labels to capitalize off of and protect their intellectual property (Basu and Werbner 2001). At the same time, a lot of these independent labels are centered around posse affiliations which provide an even more heightened sense of autonomy within the music industry through the construction of alternative identities rooted in one's posse (Forman 2000). By posse is meant a tight-knit group whose members strongly identify with the group to the point that their separate identities are subordinated to a larger group identity. The existence of these dynamics cause problems for a perspective that asserts "the mass culture industries have the power to dominate the development and diffusion of rap music" for the purpose of making rap more acceptable to the mainstream (White) audience (Blair 1993:32).

Rap is a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance

The scholars that fall into this category see rap music as a force that is directly opposed to the dominant ideology of the United States. They believe that rappers construct narratives that delegitimize the dominant ideology and actively resist cultural

domination, otherwise known as hegemony. Scholars cite everything from the invocation of authenticity claims to self-naming to give credence to their perspectives. The pieces that assert this proposition all have in common a belief that rap music has maintained its strong ties to the Black community and provides a coherent voice for the ghettos of America.

One of the primary reasons rap is seen as a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance is because of the population that rap is connected to, this population being the youth living in the areas of the various cities of the United States where poverty is concentrated, the ghetto. For example, Tricia Rose, who wrote the definitive book about rap music, states that rap is a form of Black cultural expression that gives priority to Black voices living at the margins of society (Rose 1994). She follows this up by asserting that the drawing power of rap is its narrative commitment to Black youth and cultural resistance (Rose 1994). Along the same vein, Kembre McLeod (1999) argues that rap music is not considered authentic by the Hip Hop community unless it is “ghettocentric”, meaning that the narratives of rap must address the concerns, lifestyles, and worldview of those living in the inner-city.

This dynamic also applies on a global scale. Halifu Osumare (2001), for instance, tells us that while rap within the United States may focus on anti-racism and Afrocentrism, rap in other parts of the globe will focus its narratives on the particular socio-political circumstances that marginalize people within those localized contexts. He calls these dynamics of unity and diversity within global rap, connective marginalities (Osumare 2001). What unites rap music across the globe is its commitment to the marginalized populations of the world, while the diversity in rap is a result of addressing

the specific conditions of marginality within the various local contexts. Stephanie Scherpf (2001) chimes in by stating that rap, as the voice of Hip Hop, is part of a global movement with localized sites of resistance that points to a larger awareness and analysis of global systems of oppression, corporatization, colonization, and imperialism. She believes that because of this rap has the potential to become a major agent of change (Scherpf 2001).

Some scholars cite *self-naming* as evidence of cultural resistance. According to Baruti Kopano (2002), the self-naming that rappers and other artists connected to rap engage in is a reflection of the need for oppressed Black men to assert their manhood. Annette Saddik (2003) takes this trend a step further by saying that rappers name themselves in an empowering gesture to resist the identities imposed upon them by the mainstream, White society. Most of the time, self-naming is used to fictively boost one's social standing (Kopano 2002). For example, Andre Young, one of the founders of N.W.A., took the name of Dr. Dre. Overall, the point is self-naming is a way to assert one's cultural identity and at the same time resist internalizing the dominant society's depiction of Black men as inferior.

The most potent theoretical argument of this position is the belief that rap music is a social space in which the cultural producers of rap use their relative autonomy to "keep it real" about what goes on in inner-city communities and connect this reality to systematic oppression. For instance, Rose (1994) believes that much of rap music is engaged in symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions and groups that symbolically, ideologically, and materially oppress African-Americans. One of the most common ways this can be seen is in rap narratives that articulate the chasm between

Black urban lived experience and dominant ideologies regarding equal opportunity and racial inequality (Rose 1994). In other words, rap music has the ability to present certain truths that are veiled by the dominant discourse, a discourse that is determined to present the American social structure as a just one. Rappers that effectively communicate in this way are said to “drop science”, which means to speak the truth about community conditions and disseminate wisdom (Paul 2000). In the same vein, Robin D. G. Kelley (1996) believes that rappers construct their narratives as if they are representing the communities that were the most adversely affected by economic and spatial restructuring. For this reason, rappers highlight the effects of economic restructuring and massive unemployment and contend that this is the cause of the crime, poverty, and moral depravity that is characteristic of the ghetto. Kelley (1996) also states that gangsta rappers are highly critical of law enforcement and the powers that be because of the continued denial of access to public space.

Robin Kelley (1996) continues his detailed analysis of gangsta rap by stating that the narratives constructed by rappers should be seen as weapons of the powerless that are used to dislodge a social structure that is seen as oppressive and unjust. This same social structure has produced a nightmare, and the products of this nightmare are the people that are the focus of gangsta rap narratives (Kelley 1996). Another significant conclusion that Kelley (1996) came to was the fact that rap music isn't just Black music, it is music that expresses the sentiments of the poor/working-class Black community. Ernest Allen Jr. (1996) in his exploratory piece on conscious rap, asserts that the rappers who fall into this category tend to strongly identify with Africa, emphasize a Black social identity at the expense of an American one, and extol Black cultural heroes. Also, like many other

scholars he believes that the critical voice in rap has been inherited from the Black poetry movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, whose key protagonists were the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron. These acts were known for the rhythm they brought to bear on their poetry, the verbal attacks they aimed at the U.S. government and those members of the Black community that they felt were hurting the movement, and the frequent use of the drum to provide a pulsing beat that went along with their narratives, which is similar to rap (Allen Jr. 1996).

The preceding argument may sound well and good, but a curious reader may ask, “how can rap music serve as a counter-hegemonic voice when it depends upon the distributing power of the mass culture industries to spread its message?” Several scholars answer this central question by pointing to the authenticity claims that seem to be a central aspect of rap’s narratives. The scholar that goes the farthest in addressing this issue is Kembrew McLeod. McLeod (1999) believes that rappers invoke authenticity claims to delineate in group/out group distinctions. The following is a rough synopsis of a table that shows how these distinctions are made (McLeod 1999:139):

Table 1. Support Claims of Authenticity

Semantic Dimensions	Authentic	Inauthentic
Social-psychological	staying true to self	following mass trends
Racial	Black	White
Political-economic	the underground	commercial
Gender-sexual	hard	soft
Social locational	the street	the suburbs
Cultural	the old school	mainstream

The underlying theme of this table is the embracing of all things that are closely linked to the roots of Hip Hop, such as the central city environment, self-expression, Blackness, and the cultural practice of referencing the “old school” for artistic inspiration and the shunning of all things that are closely linked to mainstream, White America, the suburban environment, commercial means of capital accumulation, Whiteness, and following mass trends (McLeod 1999). The social group that has worked to define what is to be seen as authentic and inauthentic is the Hip Hop community. The question is, does their input really matter? Historically, one could argue that it does not matter in the beginning of one’s career as a rap artist, but it does mean a lot in the long run. The best examples of this are Vanilla Ice and M.C. Hammer, both artists released albums that were huge crossover successes, but in the end their success was short lived, mainly because the cultural products they made were shunned by the Hip Hop community as too mainstream. Then again, this was the dynamic in the early 90s. Mainstream rap artists such as Nelly at the present time are still achieving commercial success in rap, although like M.C.

Hammer and Vanilla Ice his fan base has declined.

Murray Forman (2000) also chimes in on this notion of authenticity in a different way. While McLeod focuses on the creation of in group/out group distinctions, Forman focuses on how spatiality shapes the cultural production of rap music. Forman (2000) found evidence that most independent rap labels organize their operation under “posse” affiliations. This strategy is used to create a collective identity among those associated with the label and the narratives produced by these labels are defined by their localized style and themes (Forman 2000). Another function that these rap posses served was to “authenticate” potential rappers, since it is a widespread belief within rap circles that an act cannot succeed without first gaining the approval and support of a well-established crew and the ‘hood’ from which they emerge (Forman 2000). Therefore, when a rapper is successful, he is expected to maintain connections with the ‘hood’ and “keep it real” thematically, which means to construct narratives that are centered on the lived experience of the ‘hood’ (Forman 2000). It is also a well-known practice to incorporate “shout-outs” into a live performance and on a recorded album. Overall, the invocation of authenticity claims and posse affiliations are seen as protective barriers from the outside encroachment of the mass culture industries. Labeling rap performances inauthentic if they don’t address issues central to the ghetto and the rites-of-passage dynamic within rap are methods by which the cultural producers of rap use their social power to protect their niche in the global-cultural marketplace.

The last justification for asserting that rap is a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance is one that addresses the position of the cultural producers of rap in the global-cultural marketplace. According to Basu and Werbner (2001), Black entrepreneurs have

made a dent in the white domination of the music industry by converting the salience of “Blackness” into capital, staffing, and business connections. This has been achieved by retaining control of Hip Hop culture, particularly rap music, on both the creative and business fronts (Basu and Werbner 2001). According to the authors, rap music has split into the mainstream market without it being watered down for mainstream consumption and that this can be seen because Black hip hoppers are able to portray the detail, texture, complexity and sentiments of ghetto life (Basu and Werbner 2001). Basu (1998), in an earlier piece, argues that selling a lot of records does not necessarily mean ‘selling out’. If a rapper can retain one’s original constituency of listeners as well as widen it, without losing their creative, aesthetic, and narrative commitment to urban Black youth, cross-cultural and commercial success can accommodate realness (Basu 1998:374). Such a perspective refutes the Culture Industry thesis, especially when it comes to Adorno’s belief that it is the industrial power of late capitalism that shapes the culture around us, therefore, following this logic, any cultural product that achieves commercial success should be viewed with deep skepticism. In contrast, Basu believes that commercial success is OK, as long as the rappers involved maintain their narrative commitment to the marginalized populations of America. In light of this, the Culture Industry thesis is thought to be too deterministic to be effective when it comes to theorizing about rap.

Tricia Rose (1994) agrees with Basu and says that the Hip Hop community from the beginning was never opposed to commercial success. As a matter of fact, these scholars believe that it is commercial success that brings visibility to their cultural products (Rose 1994; Basu 1998). It is admitted that once the potential for commercial success is apparent the major labels attempt to dominate production and distribution,

however, the “cultural agents” of rap resist appropriation through creative innovations, such as the use of language and the creative use of production technologies (Basu 1998). This prevents the major labels from penetrating and appropriating Hip Hop style (Basu 1998). Basu (1998) believes that despite rap’s commercial success and the corporate attempts to co-opt rap music, the narratives question and negotiate dominant ideologies, social practices, and legitimacy in compelling ways and at the same time provide Black youth with a worldview, political philosophy, language and aesthetics that offer an escape route out of the ghetto.

The scholars who believe that rap music serves as a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance see the narrative commitment to Blacks living in the inner-city, self-naming, authenticity claims, ownership of intellectual property, and the creation of lyrics that directly challenge aspects of the dominant ideology of the United States as evidence that rap is a potent deconstructive tool. Despite the historical trend of appropriation that has characterized Black cultural expressivity in the past, these scholars believe that the cultural producers of rap have a protected niche within the global-cultural marketplace. This is a social space in which the cultural producers of rap have the autonomy to create music that reflects the lived experience and worldview of the marginalized populations embedded in various socio-political contexts; it is also a social space in which a dominant ideology is attacked and deconstructed to make room for narratives that reflect the worldview of the marginalized. The best way to visualize this assertion is to imagine the dominant ideology or the hegemonic discourse as a standing army of a totalitarian regime and the cultural producers of rap as a rebel force that has carved out a space where they can have autonomy. The “hegemonic standing army” naturally seeks to crush the rebel

force in the name of ideological tranquility, whereas the “counter-hegemonic rebel force” naturally seeks to resist this objective and at the same time expand the social space that has already been carved out.

Admittedly, the scholars that view rap music in this way provide us with salient points that make the assertion that rap has been completely appropriated absurd, but they also fail to give proper credit to the nature of the relationship between the independent labels that produce rap music and the major record labels that distribute rap music. This perspective also downplays the fact that some forms of rap perpetuate stereotypes that are harmful to the overall interests of the same people that rappers are said to be representing. Finally, those who believe that rap music is a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance argue that selling a lot of records should not be seen as a sign that a rapper has compromised their narrative commitment to the inner-city Black community. They feel that one can “keep it real” and sell records at the same time. I argue that this may be true in some cases, but the vast majority of the time rappers who sell lots of records compromise their commitment to the inner-city Black community in one way or another. This compromise can be reflected in several ways, but most of the time it is shown in the perpetuation of stereotypes and the construction of narratives that do not seek to challenge the dominant ideology in a significant way. These holes in the argument that rap serves as a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance force us to seek a third alternative.

Rap's critical voice has been compromised, but resistance is still there

The alternative theoretical approach posited by most of the scholars is one that asserts that rap's ability to serve as a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance has been compromised because of the constraints placed upon it by the mass culture industries, however, elements of cultural resistance are still a central part of the music. At first glance, such a proposition may seem to be a simplistic way of blending the two preceding theories together, but as we proceed it will become clear that this perspective provides us with the most comprehensive way of contextualizing rap music within the music industry in particular, and the overall society in general.

There are several key propositions that emerge from this perspective that provide some clarity in regards to rap's position within American popular culture and the mass culture industries that mediate what is experienced as popular culture. First and foremost, it is understood that rap music's relationship to the music industry is one that is characterized by what I would call a *distant cooperation*. This is meant to signify the fact that rap music is produced by independently run record labels for the most part and distributed by the commercially dominant mainstream record labels. This dynamic is the central focus of those scholars that appreciate rap's commitment to cultural resistance, but realize that this resistance is strongly compromised when it is mediated by the same industrial logic that serves the interests of the dominant elites, who are seen as the oppressors of the marginalized peoples of America.

The *distant cooperation* dynamic offers us a theoretical base from which we can address several of the contradictions inherent in the preceding theoretical perspectives and it gives us the capacity to ask questions, whose answers will reveal more conclusive information. Some of the issues that need to be addressed are the reason that gangsta rap

is more commercially successful than conscious rap, especially since conscious rap provides a more coherent and less contradictory counter-hegemonic narrative; how the *desire* to sell records to a mainstream, mostly White audience directly contradicts the production of counter-hegemonic narratives; and how this same dynamic not only influences the decision-making process of corporate executives of major labels as far as what is deemed a profitable cultural product, but also what this means to the cultural producers of rap who wish to build and maintain a relationship with these major labels. These issues and more provide the impetus for an in-depth understanding of the complex interaction between the *voice* of a culture founded on resistance (Hip Hop) and the mass culture industries that, arguably, seek to sanitize any form of cultural resistance.

The arguments provided by the scholars who believe that rap music is a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance are sound arguments that cannot be ignored or depreciated. The fact that the majority of rap's narratives are ghettocentric, celebratory of Blackness, and that they articulate the chasm between the dominant ideology and the lived experience of inner-city Blacks cannot be disputed. However, the central thing that these scholars overlooked or downplayed was the fact that the cultural products created by the rap community have to go through the "corporate pipeline" to reach their audience (Allen Jr. 1996). This fact alone has to be taken into account before someone can claim to have an accurate understanding of rap's position in relation to the dominant ideology of these United States. Consequently, my focus will be bringing the relationship between Corporate America and the cultural producers of rap to bear on the unique position that rap music has within popular culture.

Keith Negus (1999) believes that rap's position within the music industry is a

microcosm for broader cultural formations, the main one being institutional racism. He says that rap music is given limited investment due to issues such as “short shelf life”, “political reaction”, and “copyright issues” (Negus 1999). Although the marketing techniques are similar for other genres of music, when it comes to marketing rap music the term “street marketing” is used (Negus 1999). When you add this to the ways in which there always seems to be a minor/major split, based on production and distribution it becomes apparent that corporate executives feel a need to distance themselves from rap music and the ghettocentric narratives that are a major part of the music. This was not a need when it came to the rock groups of the 60s and the grunge bands of the 90s (Negus 1999). He also points out the fact that Black music divisions at major labels have a tenuous position and are usually the first to go when the company decides to make budget cuts (Negus 1999). Overall, he sees the cultural production of rap as an autonomous enterprise that interacts with the industrial logic of the mass culture industries, and these mass culture industries are a reflection of broader social formations that have historically oppressed African-Americans (Negus 1999). The distance between the corporate executives at the major labels and the cultural producers of rap music has both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect is a sense of autonomy that may not be sustainable under the auspices of a major label, but the negative aspect is the limited investment in rap and the flexibility of the major labels to choose which of rap’s cultural products to distribute and market.

Overall, scholars within this paradigm tend to disagree on how much control is wielded by the directors of the mass culture industries in the production of rap music, but they all agree that corporate coercion exists. For example, Rachel Sullivan (2003)

believes that rap's more critical voices have been marginalized in today's time and that this is due to corporate control and the fact that these cultural products are being marketed to a growing White consumer base, while Jabari Mahiri and Erin Conner (2003) say that these same social forces merely shape what is experienced as rap to some extent. This difference of opinion is representative of the theoretical range between those who feel that the mass culture industries are very coercive and those who believe that these industries are coercive in a limited way. Once again, it is important to reiterate that no matter how coercive these scholars feel that the mass culture industries are, none of the scholars that fall within this category believe that they are totally coercive when it comes to the production of rap.

One of the key characteristics of late capitalism, and the hegemonic legitimations that accompany it, is the flexibility with which it operates. When it comes to the cultural production of rap, this fact causes problems for those who may seek to reform the system as it is. For instance, one scholar insists that the music industry outmaneuvers rap artists in the name of maximizing their interests and warding off threats to their primacy (Wahl 1999). According to Wahl (1999), this maneuverability can be seen in how rappers who maintain a critical edge either tend to fade away after a while, or end up giving up their oppositional stance as their careers develop. He goes on to say that the cultural producers of rap are very aware of this dynamic and articulate their peripheral position within the music industry in their music (Wahl 1999). Like Negus, he feels that the music industry is a microcosm of the larger trend of socioeconomic domination (Wahl 1999). By conceptualizing the production and distribution of rap music in a more linear fashion, Ernest Allen Jr. (1996) says that rap has to go through the "corporate pipeline" before the

cultural products can reach the market, this is problematic in his eyes because market forces will play a decisive role in shaping and propagating the content of rap music. The reality of corporate involvement directly refutes any line of thinking that sees the cultural production and distribution of rap music as a purely autonomous social practice in which rap's producers have free reign to create whatever they would like to create and still have access to the global-cultural marketplace.

The "smoking gun" that has proved elusive, but has the potential to provide credence to this perspective is the fact that gangsta rap has achieved more commercial success than conscious rap. Although linking this fact to evidence of a strategy by corporate executives to invest more capital into the marketing and distribution of gangsta rap and less so to conscious rap goes beyond my purposes, I maintain a posture of skepticism toward any argument that suggests that gangsta rap's ascendancy is a neutral outcome that indicates its greater popularity among consumers.

Despite the numerous depictions and criticisms of gangsta rap supplied by the mainstream media, this genre of rap is not totally regressive. It would also be a mistake to see the genres of gangsta rap and conscious rap as being mutually exclusive, because there is more than a significant amount of overlap. Both genres of rap are ghettocentric and tend to deconstruct the hegemonic myths associated with the American ethos, however, there are some key distinctions. Gangsta rappers focus on asserting their manhood in ways that affirm the dominant ideology, this means that manhood becomes synonymous with misogyny and the use of violence to resolve conflicts (Saddik 2003). The narratives associated with gangsta rap seem to be contradictory in a lot of ways, but in reality their narratives articulate a wish to switch places with the dominant group (Pinn

1999). In other words, the problem isn't so much the system, it is the fact that Blacks are not full participants in this system. Conscious rappers, on the other hand, construct narratives that assert that the whole system needs to be changed (Pinn 1999). Like gangsta rappers, they lament the fact that Black people are being oppressed because of the social practices of American society, but instead of seeking to change their position within the system, they believe in and articulate the desire for more far-reaching institutional changes. Therefore, when it comes to cultural products that are truly counter-hegemonic narratives of resistance, we should look toward conscious rap to provide it.

The typical reason given for conscious rap's lack of commercial success is that it alienates consumers and for this reason it isn't profitable (Sullivan 2003). So, it is quite logical for the corporate executives, and the independent labels they do business with, to invest less time and money in the production and distribution of music that isn't going to sell. If you couple this with the fact that rap's base constituency when it comes to selling records are White, suburban youth it is easy to argue that this difference in investment is justified. The problem with such a view is that it is a little too convenient to sit well with a critical observer. First of all, there have been too many instances where rap artists have maintained a critical, counter-hegemonic posture and sold millions of records. Some notable performers that fall into this category are Public Enemy, Ice Cube, and the best selling rap artist of all-time, Tupac Shakur. The demographics of the United States did not change dramatically during this period, so the only conclusion one can come to is that White, suburban youth have no problem with buying and enjoying conscious rap. I suspect that the corporate heads of the major record labels do not wish to market and

distribute conscious rap at the same level as gangsta rap because they feel it is not in their best interest.

In this age of media consolidation, corporate firms have merged with and acquired other firms to the point where a corporation like Time Warner could own record companies, television stations and news magazines all under the same umbrella. When it comes to rap music, such a consolidation has significant implications. Rap music is one of the most negatively depicted cultural products in today's time. For instance, one article found that the vast majority of mainstream news magazines published articles that reinforced a link between rap and specific negative themes (Mahiri and Conner 2003). The most frequent criticisms leveled against rap is that it is misogynistic, promotes violence and drug use, and that it perpetuates stereotypes about Blacks. All these things have some truth to them, but the fact that these criticisms are given by so many and that they are so frequent raises some questions. The primary question is, how do we become aware of all these criticisms? The answer to the question is a simple one, the mass media, also known as the element of the mass culture industries responsible for the dissemination of information. And it is the mass media that is responsible for creating a discursive environment in which rap music has become synonymous with negativity, be it wrong or right. The overwhelming irony is that the same social forces that print and distribute the newsmagazines and various programs that have wrapped rap in a shroud of negativity are the same social forces that reap tangible benefits from distributing rap music. The fact that rap is seen by many Americans in a negative light is a huge impediment to any counter-hegemonic project that the cultural producers of rap may pursue, since such a project is dependent on public support.

The last issue that emerges from those who feel that rap's critical voice has been compromised is the lack of political efficacy inherent in a form of music that has been mediated by the mass culture industries. In a dynamic article written on conscious rap, Ernest Allen Jr. (1996) said conscious rap isn't connected with any mass political movement for social change and when you couple this fact with rap music's dependence on the market for dissemination one can't help but see this is a major political weakness. I think this is the most damaging statement for those who think that rap music is a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance capable of affecting social change. He goes on to say that efforts by rappers to expand their audience for the sake of selling records usually lead to artistic and political compromises and distortions (Allen Jr. 1996). This scholar and others who fall within this category in no way downplay the fact that rap music is a cultural form that is oppositional to the mainstream aesthetic and ideology in a variety of ways, but they do caution those who see rap music as a force capable of affecting social change to remember that rap is a form of entertainment that is mediated and distributed by a corporatized music industry whose helmsmen may feel threatened by cultural products that directly oppose the ideology that legitimizes their societal position.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Since hegemony in its pure form represents a monopoly over truth claims, I will focus the rest of my thesis on how the narratives of rap music compare to the truth claims presented to us by hegemony. One of the primary functions of a hegemonic articulation is to give legitimacy to the social structure. Therefore, the success of a hegemonic articulation is measured by its ability to provide truth claims that justify certain aspects of the social structure, while at the same time remaining beyond social debate. The three truth claims upheld by hegemony that will be compared and contrasted to the narratives of rap music are:

- 1) the notion that racism is no longer a significant constraint when it comes to the social mobility of racial minorities,
- 2) the notion that the police and other government authorities provide a public service by administering in a fair and non-discriminatory way.
- 3) the notion that no wide-scale economic changes need to be made.

If rap music is truly comprised of counter-hegemonic narratives of resistance, you would expect that these hegemonic claims will be disputed and deconstructed by the majority of those responsible for rap's cultural production.

Hegemonic truth claim #1

The first truth claim that will be compared to rap music's narratives is the claim that racism is no longer a significant constraint to the social mobility of racial minorities,

especially Blacks. One of the core principles of the American creed is the principle of egalitarianism (Leach 2002). This principle was espoused by the framers of the American republic, with its most noticeable pronouncement being, *all men are created equal*. As we know from American history, these eloquent words were written at a time when chattel slavery was one of the main socio-economic institutions of the American South and various parts of the North; an institution which enslaved men and women of African descent. One could argue that the racial issue throughout American history has been one of when and how the egalitarian statement of *all men created as equal* would be extended to Blacks and other racial minorities.

If we fast-forward past the emancipation proclamation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement, one of the fundamental aspects of American society that has remained the same is racial inequality across almost all social measures. Such measures being educational attainment, income, wealth, and political power. What has changed is the way that racial inequality is discussed, politicized, and justified. According to the dominant elites, the Civil Rights Movement was a major turning point in how American institutions both economic and political dealt with racial minorities, especially those of African descent. This “second reconstruction” is characterized by the implementation of color-blind policies across all social, economic, and political institutions (Omi and Winant 1994). Therefore, according to the dominant elites, the solution was to ignore racial differences and base everything on human capital, or the skills, merits, and knowledge an individual brings to the table (Omi and Winant 1994).

Still, this “radical transformation” leaves a question in the inquiring mind, ‘why has racial inequality persisted?’ According to a plethora of polls, the majority of White-

Americans, the dominant racial group, believe that racial minorities, especially Blacks have themselves to blame (McDonald 2001; Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick 2004; Leach 2002; Lipsitz 1995). Overwhelmingly, the most common reason given for the continuation of racial inequality was the lack of motivation or the overall lack of skills necessary for social mobility (McDonald 2001; Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick 2004; Leach 2002; Lipsitz 1995). According to Leach (2002), in his interpretation of Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, the existence of racial discrimination has been denied to protect the idealized image held by many European-Americans that their society is fair and just. According to Bonilla-Silva (2003), these attitudes about racial inequality held by Whites can be easily linked to dominant ideologies given the overall coherence of the ideas articulated by a wide range of Americans, both Black and White, and the way in which these ideas take on the appearance of "common sense".

Hegemonic truth claim #2

Beliefs about the administration of justice, specifically the role of police officers and other government officials in administering justice, can also be linked to hegemony, since these dominant ideas also take the form of "common sense". Like the preceding truth claim, one's attachment to this dominant ideology takes on a racial character. For example, the overwhelming majority of Whites (76%) believe that police in their city treat Whites, Blacks, and Latinos equally, whereas the vast majority of Blacks and a slight majority of Latinos (75% and 54%, respectively) believe they are treated worst than Whites (Weitzer and Tuch 2005:1017). It was also found that there is a huge gulf between how Whites and racial minorities (Blacks and Latinos) perceive police prejudice

and racial profiling (Weitzer and Tuch 2005:1017). Three times as many Blacks as Whites believe that police prejudice is very common and six times as many Blacks as Whites believe that police prejudice is very common in their own city (Weitzer and Tuch 2005:1017). Latinos tended to take an intermediate position between Blacks and Whites. Lastly, while Whites disapproved of racial profiling, only a third of Whites believed that profiling was pervasive in their own city, compared to 59% of Latinos and 80% of Blacks (Weitzer and Tuch 2005:1017).

The authors of the study cited came to the conclusion that their findings supported the group-position theory of race relations, which is a theory that branched from conflict theory and suggests that social groups identified as races compete for material rewards, status, and power. Although an elaboration of this theory is beyond the scope of my thesis, it should be duly noted that American hegemony has a racial element at its core. This racial element is one that seeks to justify the racial inequality that is rooted in the American social structure and the ideologies associated with the racial element tend to blame racial minorities for their disadvantaged position in society.

In a nutshell, since Whites are the dominant racial group a widespread faith in the criminal justice system can be discerned. In connection to this, the fundamental reason that “race is one the most consistent predictors of attitudes toward the police” is because Whites see the police as an ally, while most racial minorities see the police as biased at best, and as their enemy at worst (Weitzer and Tuch 2005:1010). This dynamic is consistent with my conception of hegemony since this truth claim is one that justifies racial discrepancies when it comes to the differential outcomes experienced by Blacks in comparison with Whites in their interactions with the criminal justice system. Although

you may hear of protests and demonstrations against the police and other government authorities, this in no way approaches a productive debate on the issue. Overall, any apparent racial discrepancy is seen, not as a systemic flaw, but as the criminal justice system doing its job and that is protecting the American public from criminal behavior.

Hegemonic truth claim #3

The fact that neo-liberal, supply-side economic policies have gained prominence in the U.S. is beyond debate. Such policies affirm the market as an unbiased, self-regulating social mechanism that weeds out inefficiencies and provides the means for prosperity for the citizens of the host nation. The fact that this dominant ideology has transcended political party is reflected by the fact that neo-liberal policies have progressively gained momentum from the late 1970s to today's time, despite the fact that two democratic presidents (Jimmy Carter 1976-80 and Bill Clinton 1992-2000) have taken office during this period (Kerbo 2003). Although inequality has skyrocketed during this period, the dominant ideology suggests that no wide-scale economic changes need to be made to correct this situation (Kerbo 2003). This is a truth-claim that is legitimated and broadcast by the mainstream media and other outlets.

The liberalization of market forces, far from acting within the economic realm alone, has interpenetrated both the political and cultural realms (McDaniel 2001). Politically this can be seen in calls for less government, which means a diminished focus on social justice and redistribution, but an increased reliance on the automatic adjustment of the market (McDaniel 2001:269). Culturally this can be witnessed in the rise of

consumer culture and the way in which the social forces involved fracture traditional ways of cultivating identity in reference to family, religion, and patriotism and the way in which these same forces consolidate consuming subjects through the dissemination of advertised signs and symbols that entice consumers and lead them to seek self-enhancement by consuming and displaying particular products (Zukin and Maguire 2004; McDaniel 2001). This interpenetration testifies to the fact that free market sentiments and the elites that espouse them have gained a preponderance in our society and have profoundly shaped our social reality.

If the news media is the source of information for the majority of Americans, then it would be natural for the news media and the corporations that hold ownership in the major news stations to enter this discussion. Kerbo (2003) cites a study conducted by Herman and Chomsky (1988) on how news stories are slanted to support the interests of the dominant elites. Kerbo (2003:440) lists the five following reasons that the news reinforces the dominant ideology:

- 1) Much of the news media in the U.S. is owned by the upper class and major corporations whose interests are profit-directed.
- 2) The major mass media are primarily dependent on advertising to stay in business, which leaves the media open to pressure from corporate elites.
- 3) The media relies on information provided by government, academic, and business experts who are linked to the agents of power, and who therefore, will present information that support the interests of the elites.
- 4) There are “flak-generating” organizations that will create so many problems for the media if they present information which the dominant elites deem ‘objectionable’ that the media has learned to be self-censored.
- 5) The repeated espousing of “anticommunist” and “antiterrorist” sentiments are similar to religious anathemas and are used as a control mechanism to mislead the public and justify what is done in U.S. corporate and government interest.

In short, the ascendancy of the market as the central social mechanism is praised and promoted by a dominant ideology that does not allow any room for competing truth-

claims that express concern for the increasing inequality and social fragmentation that characterize a neo-liberal order.

The other two realms that I will use in my operations are realms that will measure the levels of resistance to stereotypes and the levels of cultural assertion. Although these measures do not hold the same counter-hegemonic weight that a direct challenge to the hegemonic truth-claims outlined above hold, they are counter-hegemonic in the sense of maintaining a sense of cultural pride in the face of white supremacy and challenging stereotypical notions of Blackness in the face of common sense notions of racial difference. Cultural products that display cultural pride and a resistance to stereotypes, along with a counter-hegemonic narrative that disputes the truth-claims outlined previously will be categorized as the most counter-hegemonic products.

According to La Grone (2000) and other rap theorists, one of the major features of gangsta rap is the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, which include the stereotypes that Black males are violent and sexually promiscuous (Kelley 1996; Johnson, Trawalter, and Dovodio 2000). Therefore, I will devote one operational measure within my operations to *resistance to stereotypes*, since these stereotypical attributions affirm the dominant ideologies that depict the plight of Blacks as stemming from their inability to delay gratification, along with other things. Such hegemonic articulations use these instances to blame the victim, instead of calling the system into question (Jones 2001). This operational measure will focus on the ability displayed by the performer/character to form an emotional connection with a member of the opposite sex.

As far as cultural assertion goes, I will utilize three operational measures that capture the essence of cultural assertion in rap. First of all, I will evaluate these albums

on the basis of lyrical complexity. This is an important measure because it signifies how serious and dedicated the rapper is in perfecting a craft that represents an autonomous cultural practice within Hip Hop culture. A rapper who crafts lyrics of complexity takes his art seriously and this usually means that the rapper appreciates the fact that rap music derived from Hip Hop, and the raps performed are more than a way to make money.

Kewbrew McLeod (1999) asserts that the cultural producers of rap protect their niche in the global-cultural marketplace through the invocation of authenticity claims. Two of the fundamental ways in which authenticity is invoked is through constructing rap narratives that have pro-Black sentiments at their core along with themes that are ghettocentric (McLeod 1999). When it comes to pro-Black sentiments, what is meant is a clearly demonstrated appreciation of the Black aesthetic, culture, and community. For example, McLeod (1999:141) quotes Ice Cube as saying that he has no problem with White people, but his lyrics are directed toward the struggles and aspirations of the Black community; White America is not being addressed when he raps. Another example of pro-Black sentiments are instances in which rappers praise the physical features and cultural idiosyncrasies of Black people. Therefore, cultural products that reflect such an orientation are seen as authentic within the Hip Hop community. The ghettocentricity within rap is reflective of the narrative commitment of rappers to the communities that they have come from, or the communities in which most Black people live, which are simply called the “ghettoes”. A rapper is said to “keep it real” if they remain true to where they come from by speaking on situations specific to the ghetto and shouting out particular areas that are identified with the ghetto. This sustained focus within rap music is culturally assertive and at the same time serves as a barrier that defends against outside

encroachment (McLeod 1999).

Ultimately, I am utilizing the seven operational measures in my operations that are the most useful in evaluating the nature of the relationship between rap music and hegemony. I expect to find that the relationship between rap music and hegemony has changed over time and this change reflects the convergence of increasing media consolidation with the increasing popularity that rap music has with the White, suburban youth of American. Such a change means that rap music has become less critical of the status quo, less culturally assertive and less resistant to stereotypical attributions. These trends are regressive if one considers the ideological roots of rap, but I also expect to find that significant amounts of cultural resistance still exist, especially when it comes pro-Black sentiments and ghettocentricity. If this expectation holds true, the idea that rap music is a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance capable of producing social change will be silenced.

The shift from coherent counter-hegemonic narratives to those that are less so, should not be taken as a sign that the frustrations and concerns of the cultural producers of rap have been addressed to the satisfaction of those whom they feel they represent through their music. I propose that rap music has gone through a transition that is best described by James Scott's theoretical perspective which posits the existence of *public* and *hidden* transcripts. In the early phase of rap, I assert that rap's narratives were constructed in reference to the *hidden transcript* and sought to speak with a unified, coherent voice that deconstructed dominant ideologies. In the later phase of rap a transition can be discerned and the thrust behind this transition is the incorporation of rap music into the mainstream channels of the music industry, which is an appendage of the

media conglomerates. Consequently, the narratives of rap music were constructed in reference to the dominant *public transcript* and with this change of focus comes the erosion of counter-hegemonic elements that were once at the core of rap's narratives.

Study Design

To properly assess rap music's historical relationship to hegemony I employed a number of inter-related strategies to get the best picture possible. First of all, taking the advice of several independent record stores, I used the second week of July as the week to view *Billboard* magazine's top 200 album charts, since this was identified as the peak time of year for rap releases. From these charts, I randomly sampled 10 albums if there were at least 10 albums on that chart. To complete this task, I documented the corresponding number of each rap album on the charts from 1984 - 2004, skipping every other year. For example, if X-Clan's *Xodus* was #95 on the top 200 charts I listed this number and I used the same process for each rap album on the charts. Next, I labeled stickers from 1 - 200 and cut out individual stickers, leaving each one on the wax paper. I drew out numbers one by one until I drew out the 10 numbers that corresponded with the rap albums I documented. I did this for each year and the results of the random sample accompany this document in the appendix. The only two years that did not meet the requirement of having at least 10 albums on the top 200 chart are 1984 and 1986. Consequently, I included all the albums that did fall onto these two charts in my analysis (1 for 1984, 3 for 1986).

The next step was to draw another random sample, this time a sample of three tracks from each of the albums that were drawn from my first sample. The number of labeled pegs were determined by the number of tracks for each album. For example, the album *Tougher than Leather* by Run-DMC had 16 tracks, therefore, I placed the pegs numbered from #1 to #16 into a bowl and then drew numbers until 3 tracks were selected. This continued until all of the albums in my sample had 3 tracks chosen. Certain issues did arise while drawing this sample. The most frequent issue I came across was drawing track numbers in expectation that these numbers would correspond to rap songs, when the track would actually be a skit of some sort. This did not cause much of a problem when I had a hard copy of the CD at my disposal, but because I downloaded a lot of the tracks off of iTunes instead of redrawing these numbers I would use track #3 or any multiple of 3 that worked (a track not previously selected and clearly a rap song) as the selected default track. Unfortunately, since I was unfamiliar with most of the tracks I came across I also had the issue of purchasing tracks on iTunes that seemed to be rap songs according to the time listed for the tracks' duration, but finding out later that they were either long skits or instrumental tracks.

In the process of gathering all of this data, I began my analysis. I utilized the seven operational measures discussed earlier to evaluate how the narratives of rap music relate to American hegemony (see Tables 2 and 3). I chose to weight these measures by category; these two categories being direct counter-hegemonic articulations and indirect counter-hegemonic articulations. The distinction between these categories is that a counter-hegemonic articulation directly confronts or deconstructs one of the hegemonic truth claims associated with American hegemony, whereas an indirect counter-hegemonic

articulation is a narrative which is culturally assertive or resistant to stereotypical attributions.

Table 2. Direct Operational Measures

Operational Measures	Affirms Hegemony	Neutral	Counters Hegemony
Critical of Racism	Explicitly states that racism either doesn't exist or its good.	No mention of racism, or does not make significant statement.	Affirms racism's existence and denounces racist practices.
Critical of pol/gov't	Contains statements that praise the police and those in gov't.	Not mentioned in the lyrics; no coherent statement given.	Critical of pol/gov't officials; violently opposed
Promotes econ ch.	Clear glorifications of consumerism and wealth	No coherent statements on the subject; balanced take.	Clearly laments poverty and promotes economic change.

Table 3. Indirect Operational Measures

Operational Measure	Affirms Hegemony	Neutral	Counters Hegemony
Lyrical complexity	Lyrics w/ a simplistic rhyme scheme and poorly crafted	Lyrics are simplistic, but coherent; rhymes on beat	Coherent lyrics that rhyme in complex ways; rhymes on beat.
Pro-Black	Lyrics performed demean Blacks as a racial group.	No coherent pro-Black sentiments articulated	Pro-Black sentiments are presented in a coherent way
Ghettocentricity	Lyrics are descriptive of areas outside the inner-city	No clear mention of anything related to the inner-city.	Lyrics are descriptive of the ghetto; homage paid to location
Can form emot conn.	Lyrics describe relationships that are sexual or exploitative	No significant mention of relationships.	Lyrics describe relationships with an emotional connection.

The scale used for the three operational measures that fall within the direct counter-hegemonic category goes from -2 to +2, with 0 corresponding to a neutral score, while the scale used for the four operational measures that fall within the indirect counter-hegemonic category goes from -1 to +1, again with 0 corresponding to a neutral score. As I stated earlier, the difference between direct and indirect counter-hegemonic elements is that direct counter-hegemonic elements directly contest the hegemonic truth claims outlined earlier, whereas indirect counter-hegemonic elements do not contest these

truth claims, but instead are either culturally assertive or resistant to stereotyping. For each operational measure there were only three possible scores, a positive score (+2 or +1), a neutral score (0), or a negative score (-2 or -1) (see Table 3). A positive score represents a counter-hegemonic element within the song, while a negative score represents an element within the song which affirms hegemony. With this in mind the lowest score possible for a rap song using these operational measures was a -10, with the highest score possible being a +10.

Table 4. Coding System

CD 1	Crit of Racism	Crit of pol/gov't	Promote econ chan	Lyrical Compl.	Pro-Black	Ghettocn	Can form emot conn	Total
Track1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	4
Track2	2	2	-2	0	1	0	0	3
Track3	0	0	0	1	1	1	-1	2 9/3=3

For descriptive purposes, I have made distinctions when it comes to the levels at which a cultural product either counters hegemony or affirms hegemony. A high level score ranges -7 to -10 in regards to affirming hegemony and +7 to +10 in regards to countering hegemony. A moderate score ranges from -3 to -6.9 and +3 to +6.9, respectively, and a low level score ranges from -.01 to -2.9 and +.01 to +2.9, respectively.

The operational measures were used on a track by track basis. Each time a song was played I rated the song using a hand-written version of Table 2. The sum of the scores across the seven measures was placed in the last column, which represented the

sum of scores for each track. After all three tracks sampled from an album were rated, I calculated the sum of all three sums and divided this number by three. The calculated mean score represents the counter-hegemonic value of each album. Since there were ten albums being evaluated for each year (except for 1984 and 1986 as discussed earlier), I would then perform a similar operation by calculating the sum of the counter-hegemonic values of these albums and dividing this number by the number of albums evaluated for that year. The mean score obtained is representative of the counter-hegemonic value of the rap albums that were sold during that year.

Once these operational measures were brought to bear on the cultural products within my analysis, I looked at the several trends that I expected to yield pertinent information about rap music's relationship to hegemony. The primary thing to consider is how rap music's relationship to hegemony has changed from rap's early days to the present day. Other factors worthy of consideration were the changes in the values obtained through each operational measure. For example, how the values obtained utilizing the "ability to form emotional connections with the opposite sex" measure varied across time. Another major factor that deserves attention is the difference in the overall distribution of scores across the three scale measures, *affirms hegemony*, *neutral*, and *counters hegemony* by year. Lastly, I decided to compare the number of rap albums that fell within some of the specified ordinal categories within my scale by year. For example, a comparison could be made between the number of rap albums that fell within the "moderately counter-hegemonic" category in 1990 and 2000. The overall purpose of this methodology is to get a general picture of rap music's relationship to hegemony utilizing random sampling techniques to gather the data and operational measures to

properly evaluate this relationship across time.

To test the reliability of my operational measures I utilized the services of an enthusiastic volunteer by the name of Matthew Real, whose job was to take a sample of the rap albums used in my analysis and rate the various songs of each album by way of the coding system. The scores that were compared were the scores obtained for each song. Since, Matt had a sample of 19 CDs, this means that the 57 scores he calculated were compared to the 57 scores I calculated for the same songs. The reliability test employed was the Cronbach Alpha test. The scores that I obtained using the coding system took the form of *item1*, while Matt's scores took the form of *item2*. The 57 scores were considered the subjects of the study. Admittedly, it is a questionable usage of the Cronbach Alpha test, but the importance of verifying the reliability and repeatability of the operational measures could not be ignored.

I was able to obtain the Cronbach alpha value by way of a website affiliated with the University of Connecticut. This measure of internal consistency came to an alpha value of 0.68. Usually, a reliable score is 0.70 and up, but the fact that the score calculated is only two-tenths of a point away has to count for something. As I said earlier, it is doubtful whether this or any other test of reliability could yield results that fit the nature of this data, especially given the number of zeroes and the negative scores that were calculated into this particular test of internal consistency. Another thing to note is that if one album (3 songs) was removed from this test, namely an album titled *Capital Punishment* by Big Pun, the alpha value goes from a 0.68 to a 0.74, which is a reliable alpha. In relation to the other albums used in the test, this represents a singular case that greatly influences the alpha score. Matt and I were clearly in disagreement when it came

to this album, since I scored the three tracks sampled 4, 2, and 2, while Matt scored the same songs -2, 1, and -1, respectively. Such a revelation only adds to the skepticism about using the Cronbach alpha in this case, but I am content with the results of this reliability test since it is very close to a reliable value despite doubts of its applicability in this particular case.

The statistical technique that will be employed to yield the majority of the results discussed in the next chapter is the chi-square test of independence. The purpose of the several tests I will run is to identify whether there is a relationship between the time in which these albums landed on the *Billboard* charts and their counter-hegemonic value. All the statistical tests used will be based upon contingency tables that contain the frequency of occurrences for the various categories I will use (the dependent variable) and how these variable interact with the time in which the album was on the charts (the independent variable). For example, I will run a test on affirmations of hegemony versus narratives that counter hegemony and measure this by how these variables intersect with three time periods, from 1984 - 1990, from 1992 - 1998, and the years from 2000 - 2004. Such a test will yield a 3 X 3 contingency table with the various time periods as my independent variable and the responses to hegemony as my dependent variable. The chi-square test of independence is an effective statistical test that measures the independence of two or more variables. If a chi-square is small, which means it has a value below the critical value, we can declare that there is no relationship between the variables, they are independent. However, if one gets a large chi-square, which means it is equal to or above the critical value, we can declare that there is a significant relationship between the variables, which means they are not operating independently. One variable has a direct

effect upon the other one. The benefit of running these statistical tests is that they provide us with the ability to say something substantive about the counter-hegemonic potency of rap music by telling us how it has changed over time, if it indeed has changed.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

The first thing that I noticed once I began the process of analyzing my data was how the mean scores calculated for each year began to cluster around certain values. A closer inspection of the mean scores showed that the mean scores calculated for each year could be separated into three time periods, namely, the periods between 1984 - 1990, 1992 - 1998, and the period from 2000 to 2004. Consequently, I found the mean of each of these time periods and the calculated mean scores obtained for each of these time periods are 1.53, 1.87, and 1.09, respectively. The following table displays the calculated mean scores for each year analyzed:

Table 5. Mean Scores for Each Year

Year	Mean	Year	Mean
1984	2	1996	1.36
1986	1.1	1998	1.85
1988	1.49	2000	1.23
1990	1.53	2002	0.94
1992	2.23	2004	1.1
1994	2.05		

The basis of the rest of my analysis is the three time periods by which the data was separated. Functionally, these three historical time periods are the independent variables for the six statistical tests, whereas the dependent variables are based upon the subject of inquiry. For the sake of brevity, the odd numbered tables (Tables 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15) display the frequency scores across each delineated category, while the even numbered tables (Tables 6, 8, 10, 12, and 14) display the values of the chi-square statistic.

The first chi-square test of independence performed was one that measured the relationship between the time period in which the albums fell onto the *Billboard* charts, or period of release, and the variance found within the counter-hegemonic responses gleaned from the seven operational measures. For example, how the frequency of Pro-Black sentiments was related to the time period of release. The chi-square test displayed in Table 6 was found to be significant at .05 level ($df = 12$; $\chi^2 = 22.71$). The scores that are in bold represent the ones that contributed the most to the significantly high chi-square (I used 1.0 as my cut-off point). According to the table, a rap album released between 1984 - 1990 is more likely to promote wide-scale economic change. Also, an album released between 1992 - 1998 is less likely to be lyrically complex, while albums released between 2000 - 2004 are more likely to be lyrically complex. An album released between 1984 - 1990 is more likely to contain Pro-Black sentiments, while an album released between 2000 - 2004 is less likely to contain Pro-Black sentiments. Finally, it can be gleaned from the table that an album released between 1984 - 1990 is less likely to be ghettocentric.

The next chi-square test shown in Table 8 sought to measure the relationship

between the time period of release and the responses that affirmed hegemony gleaned from the seven operational measures. Once the chi-square was calculated it was found that no significant relationship existed. The chi-square calculated for this set of data was

Table 6. Counter-Hegemonic Scores by Operational Measure and Year

Operational Measure	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Critical of Racism	1	5	1	7
Critical of pol/gov't	7	24	9	40
Promotes econ. ch.	2	1	0	3
Lyrical complexity	53	98	74	225
Pro-Black	16	18	4	38
Ghettocentricity	24	71	38	133
Can form emot con.	4	8	3	15
Totals	107	225	129	461

Table 7. Chi-Square Statistic*

Operational Measure	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Critical of Racism	0.23	0.75	0.43	1.41
Critical of pol/gov't	0.57	0.99	0.43	1.99
Promotes econ. ch.	2.41	0.23	0.9	3.54
Lyrical complexity	.01	1.27	1.92	3.2
Pro-Black	5.89	.01	4.11	10.01
Ghettocentricity	1.54	0.55	0.01	2.10
Can form emot con.	0.07	0.05	0.34	0.46
Totals	10.72	3.85	8.14	22.71

* Numbers in bold represent those values that contributed the most the significantly high chi-square

3.02, while the critical value for this 7 X 3 table (df = 12) is 21.027 to be significant at the .05 level. The lack of variance may be due to the overall lack of instances of affirmations of hegemony, since the significance of the chi-square test tends to be affected by the scale (N) of the data analyzed.

The third test of significance was one that measured the relationship between the time period of release and the likelihood of a rap album affirming, countering, or remaining neutral to hegemony. Table 10 shows that the chi-square value obtained was 17.27, which is a value that is significant at the .01 level when the degrees of freedom are

Table 8. Hegemonic Scores by Operational Measure and Year

Operational Measure	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Critical of Racism	0	0	0	0
Critical of pol/gov't	0	0	0	0
Promotes econ. ch.	1	5	6	12
Lyrical complexity	1	1	0	2
Pro-Black	0	0	0	0
Ghettocentricity	0	0	0	0
Can form emot con.	8	20	25	53
Totals	10	26	31	67

Table 9. Chi-Square Statistic

Operational Measure	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Promotes econ. ch.	0.36	0.02	0.03	.41
Lyrical Complexity	1.63	0.05	0.9	2.58
Can form emot con.	.001	0.02	0.01	.03
Totals	1.99	0.09	0.94	3.02

equal to or less than 4. The values that contributed the most to the high chi-square are once again in bold. So, it can be gleaned from this statistical test that an album released between 1984 - 1990 is less likely to affirm hegemony, while an album released between 2000 - 2004 is more likely to affirm hegemony. An album released between 1992 - 1998

is less likely to be neutral in its relationship to hegemony. Lastly, an album released between 1992 - 1998 is more likely to counter hegemony, whereas an album released between 2000 - 2004 is less likely to counter hegemony.

I stated earlier that the size of the data set tends to affect the likelihood of a chi-square being found either significant or insignificant. Consequently, because of the large number of neutral scores (73.3% of all scores) I performed a chi-square test with only

Table 10. Hegemonic vs. Counter-Hegemonic Scores by Year

Response to Hegemony	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Affirms Hegemony	10	26	31	67
Neutral	386	589	471	1446
Counters Hegemony	108	225	128	461
Totals	504	840	630	1974

Table 11. Chi-Square Statistic*

Response to Hegemony	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Affirms Hegemony	3.01	0.24	4.42	7.67
Neutral	0.79	1.22	0.20	2.21
Counters Hegemony	0.82	4.04	2.53	7.39
Totals	4.62	5.5	7.15	17.27

* Numbers in bold represent those values that contributed the most to the significantly high chi-square

those scores that either affirmed or countered hegemony. Despite the absence of the neutral scores this statistical test still yielded a chi-square that is significant at the .01 level. The results of this test, shown in Table 12, tell us that an album released between 1984 - 1990 and an album released between 1992 - 1998 is less likely to affirm hegemony, while an album released between 2000 - 2004 is more likely to affirm

hegemony.

Table 12. Hegemonic vs. Counter-Hegemonic Scores by Year*

Response to Hegemony	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Affirms Hegemony	10	26	31	67
Counters Hegemony	108	225	128	461
Totals	118	251	159	528

* excluding neutral scores

Table 13. Chi-Square Statistic*

Response to Hegemony	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Affirms Hegemony	1.61	1.06	5.77	8.44
Counters Hegemony	0.26	0.16	0.84	1.26
Totals	1.87	1.22	6.61	9.70

* Numbers in bold represent those values that contributed the most to the significantly high chi-square

The fifth statistical test sought to measure the relationship between the time period of release and the scores that directly and/or indirectly affirmed hegemony, as well as the scores that directly and/or indirectly countered hegemony. Directly affirming or countering hegemony means to contain narratives that either affirm or contest the three hegemonic truth claims outlined earlier, while indirectly affirming or contesting hegemony signifies the degree to which rap narratives displayed cultural assertiveness and/or the ability to resist stereotypical attributions. Table 14 displays the yielded results, which were significant at the .025 level. The calculated chi-square value was 15.14. From this table, it can be gleaned that an album released between 1984 - 1990 is less likely to directly affirm hegemony, while an album released between 2000 - 2004 is more likely to directly affirm hegemony. An album released between 1992 - 1998 is less likely

to indirectly affirm hegemony, whereas an album released between 2000 - 2004 is more likely to indirectly affirm hegemony. Finally an album released between 1992 - 1998 is more likely to directly counter hegemony, while an album released between 2000 - 2004 is less likely to directly counter hegemony.

The final chi-square test of significance measured the relationship between the time period of release and the likelihood that a rap album fell within a specific ordinal category that corresponds with the mean score of each album. Table 15 displays

Table 14. Strength of Response to Hegemony by Year

Response to Hegemony	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Directly Affirms Heg	1	5	6	12
Indirect Affirms Heg	9	21	25	55
Direct Counters Heg	10	30	10	50
Indirect Count Heg	98	195	118	411
Totals	118	251	159	528

Table 15. Chi-Square Statistic*

Response to Hegemony	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Directly Affirms Heg	1.07	0.11	3.56	4.74
Indirect Affirms Heg	0.84	1.00	4.38	6.22
Direct Counters Heg	0.13	1.62	1.72	3.47
Indirect Count Heg	0.45	.00005	0.26	0.71
Totals	2.49	2.73	9.92	15.14

* Numbers in bold represent those values that contributed the most to the significantly high chi-square

the seven ordinal categories that range from *strongly affirms hegemony* to *strongly counters hegemony*, while Table 16 shows the chi-square table with those categories in

which no album fell eliminated. The calculate chi-square for this data set was 4.21, a value far lower than the critical value (12.592 for the .05 level) needed to find a relationship between the variables. With that said, it is still important to note that the percentage of albums found to be moderately counter-hegemonic is 3.3% for years between 2000 - 2004, while the same percentages for the years between 1984 - 1990 and 1992 - 1998 are 16.7% and 17.5%, respectively. It should also be noted that the total percentage of albums found to be weakly counter-hegemonic is 75.5%, an outcome that surely affected the likelihood of the chi-square yielding a value that was statistically insignificant.

Table 16. Number of Rap Albums within Hegemonic Category by Year

Hegemonic Category	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Strongly Affirm Heg	0	0	0	0
Moderately Aff. Heg	0	0	0	0
Weakly Aff. Heg	1	3	3	7
Neutral	1	2	1	4
Weakly Count Heg	18	28	25	71
Moderat Count Heg	4	7	1	12
Strongly Count Heg	0	0	0	0
Totals	24	40	30	94

Table 17. Chi-Square Statistic*

Hegemonic Category	1984 - 1990	1992 - 1998	2000 - 2004	Totals
Weakly Aff. Heg	0.36	0	0.29	0.65
Neutral	0	0.05	0.07	0.12
Weakly Count Heg	.0006	0.16	0.25	0.4106
Moderat Count Heg	0.26	0.71	2.06	3.03
Totals	.6206	0.92	2.67	4.21

* Numbers in bold represent those values that contributed the most to the significantly high chi-square

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: HEGEMONY AND RAP

I dumbed down for my audience, it doubled 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 (a conscious rapper)/Truthfully, I wanna rhyme like Common Sense (another conscious rapper)/But I did 5 mil (million)/I ain't been rhyming like Common since/When you sense you got that much in common and you've been hustling since/Your inception for perception go with what makes sense/Since, I know what I'm up against/We as rappers must decide what's most important/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....

- Jay-Z "Moment of Clarity". *The Black Album*

Technique, chemically unstable, set to explode/Foretold by the Dead Sea Scrolls written in codes/So if your message ain't \$%%, %\$#@ the records you sold/Cuz if you go platinum, it's got nothing to do with luck/It just means that a million people are stupid as %\$#@/Stuck in the underground a general that rose to the limit/Without distribution, managers, a deal or a gimmick/Revolutionary Volume 2 murder the critics/And leave your %\$#@ing body rotting for the roaches and crickets...*

- Immortal Technique "Industrial Revolution". *Revolutionary Vol. II*

The two quotes above represent two opposing schools of thought about what rap music should represent. Jay-Z, one of the greatest lyricists as well as one of the most commercially successful rappers of all time, believes that rappers should "dumb down for the audience" in order to sell records, which will reap the economic rewards necessary to give back to the community in ways that are productive. Immortal Technique, a very talented underground MC, rejects this line of thinking and believes rap music should be used as a tool to enlighten and empower the marginalized citizens of America. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to settle this dispute, it is an interesting debate and shows how two MCs, one very famous and commercially successful, and the other "stuck

in the underground”, view their respective positions within the music industry’s hierarchy. Both MCs, through their music, demonstrate an understanding of what the intersection of race and class has done to the communities from which they have emerged. They also seem to understand the contradictory dynamics of being a rapper familiar with the “ghetto” and the life of the people who reside there, while taking part in and reaping the benefits of an economic system that has traditionally been at odds with people of their type. All in all, they made distinct choices about how they would frame their music and the choices they made have influenced their divergent career paths. Although my analysis was not centered on why rap music has developed in the way that it has, it does give us some clues as to why the cultural products of a rapper like Immortal Technique may stick out like a sore thumb in relation to the majority of the rap music coming out now. For instance, it may impel someone to ponder the likelihood of Immortal Technique being signed to a major label if he had come out twelve years ago.

The two central questions I sought to answer in this thesis are: Has rap music’s relationship to hegemony changed?, and, if so, How has it changed? The analysis conducted has answered these two questions adequately and has yielded results that cannot be ignored by an unbiased observer. The truth is rap music’s relationship to hegemony has changed, but the change that has occurred is a bit more complex than anticipated. Admittedly, I anticipated a change that was clear cut and linear in nature, but the changes observed were curvilinear, meaning that rap music’s relationship to hegemony has developed in a way that has gone from slightly counter-hegemonic to a high point that came relatively close to moderately counter-hegemonic. After this high point, a gradual decline in the counter-hegemonic potency can be discerned, a decline

that took rap's counter-hegemonic potency to its lowest level. The most illuminating way to see these trends clearly is to separate rap music's brief lifespan into three time periods: the years between 1984 - 1990, 1992 - 1998, and the years between 2000 - 2004.

1984 - 1990

The period from the year 1984 to 1990 is the *early period* of rap music. The most striking characteristic of this period in rap is that most of the narratives constructed by these early rappers were focused on competition. The main concern of these rappers seemed to be to prove to the Hip Hop community that they were the best rapper and that other rappers were inferior when it came to matching the lyrical prowess of the MC on record. So, when you listen to the music of this period you notice that these rappers were not really too concerned about the social problems endemic to the inner-city. The primary concern was to be the best rapper and to have fun making the music.

With that said, there are some significant counter-hegemonic elements within the narratives of this period. For instance, unlike the other two time periods the cultural products of this period were more likely to promote wide-scale economic change as well as contain narratives that had Pro-Black sentiments weaved in the music. It is likely that these counter-hegemonic elements are present due to the fact that this time period was close in proximity to the roots of Hip Hop, which means that the MCs had the direct experience of living in the marginalized sections of New York from which Hip Hop culture emerged and have direct knowledge of the spoken word texts of the Last Poets as well as the revolutionary rhetoric of cultural heroes like Malcolm X and the Black

Panthers.

The other aspect of this time period worth noting is the fact that the cultural products of this period were less likely to affirm hegemony, especially in a direct way. The cultural products of rap within my analysis directly affirmed hegemony by glorifying material gains and celebrating their ability to be full participants in consumer culture. These affirmations of hegemony are nearly absent (just one instance observed) in this period. Another distinction that emerges from the analysis is that the rap albums released between 1984 - 1990 do not contain as many ghettocentric elements as the other two periods. Again, this is mainly because the narratives at this time were primarily concerned with glorifying the author's lyrical ability. The secondary concern seemed to be telling stories about relatively trivial events, like parties or relationships that went right or wrong. Next came subjects such as the need to stop the violence within the Black community and self-empowerment. The importance of this period in rap was the ability of its cultural producers to create a distinct form of music that experienced flashes of commercial success without linking its narratives to the dominant ideologies. Some of the cultural producers of rap even went a step further and were engaged in articulating themselves in ways that were culturally assertive and challenging to the dominant ideologies.

1992 - 1998

The next time period was built upon the foundation laid down in the previous period, but took a different form that is worthy of placing the period in question into its

own era. This era is the *gutta period*. The term *gutta* signifies an immersion in a social reality that is characterized by a sense of social abandonment, little hope, a reliance on street smarts to survive, and a disdainful attitude towards the police and those in high-level leadership positions. This is by far the time period that saw the distribution of the most counter-hegemonic cultural products. As a matter of fact, the three most counter-hegemonic rap albums come from this period.

In regards to what can be gleaned from the analysis, although the cultural products of this era are less likely to be lyrically complex, they are more likely to directly counter hegemony, which means the albums of this period contain narratives that dispute and deconstruct the hegemonic truth claims that are central to the dominant ideologies. The hegemonic truth claim that is challenged the most is the one that depicts the police and other government entities in positions of authority as social servants that are worthy of praise and respect. The cultural producers of rap consistently dispute this claim by painting a picture in which the police are crooked and unjust in their dealings with the inner-city Black communities and the politicians are seen as corrupt for the most part. The cultural products of this era, like the previous one are also less likely to affirm hegemony. The difference being that while the 1984 - 1990 period was less likely to directly affirm hegemony, the period between 1992 - 1998 is less likely to indirectly affirm hegemony.

Another general characteristic of this period is the overall diversity found in these cultural products. There are three main genres of rap that are the most visible, namely gangsta rap, conscious rap, and a genre not yet discussed in this thesis, booty rap. Booty rap has its roots in Miami and consists of rapidly thumping beats accompanied by

nonsensical lyrics. The primary value of this genre of rap is to liven a party and get women to gyrate their bodies in ways that are sexually alluring. Although this genre's roots are in Miami it has spread primarily to Atlanta. The rap albums of this genre tended to be among the least counter-hegemonic of the products of this analysis due to the overall lack of lyrical complexity, the pervasive silence on social issues, and the apparent obsession with objectified sex. This diversity of genre accounts for the relatively low counter-hegemonic values that were calculated for the years of this period despite the counter-hegemonic potency of several of the albums that came out at that time.

The elements found in the cultural products of this period that are more pronounced than those found in the previous period are the ghettocentric narratives that provide a glimpse into the lives of those that inhabit neighborhoods plagued by a concentration of poverty, and, as I mentioned earlier, an increase in the production of narratives that directly challenge the hegemonic truth claims of the dominant ideologies. The cultural producers of rap of this era actively sought to make music that addressed some of the fundamental issues that were relevant to the communities from which many of them came. Issues such as police brutality and street violence, plus detailed stories that elaborated upon the consequences of being raised in the ghetto were common features of the rap of this period. There were also some regressive elements beginning to emerge within the music, such as an increase in narratives that directly affirmed hegemony by glorifying consumerism as well as an increase in lyrics that framed relationships between men and women as adversarial and exploitative. Overall, this was a special period in rap, one that saw the cultural producers of rap blend commercial success with the lyrical integrity associated with the phrase "keeping it real".

2000 - 2004

The period from the year 2000 - 2004 is the most important era to understand. This era is the *commercial period* of rap, which means that the rap music of this time is among the top-selling musical genres. Comparatively, the number of albums sold during this period outpaces the other two eras to a significant degree and unlike the previous periods, where you saw only a handful of albums selling millions upon millions of copies, it is almost a foregone conclusion that a rap album will go platinum. Usually, such wide-scale commercial success would be celebrated, especially when you consider rap's humble beginnings within the cradle of Hip Hop. Unfortunately, there are several trends that have developed during this time that warrant our attention before we bust out the champagne glasses.

We'll start off on a positive note, acknowledging the fact that an album released during this time is more likely to be lyrically complex. Lyrical complexity is the element found in rap music that has been the most consistent across all three time periods. No matter what you may talk about in your lyrics, there is a need to craft lyrics that are coherent, in rhythm with the music, and that fit into complex rhyming schemes. This period saw an upsurge in the commitment to the careful crafting of lyrics. The rest of the trends that were observed are regressive in nature and it is surprising how distinct this time period is in comparison with the others.

First of all, while the *early period* was a time in which Pro-Black sentiments were a substantial part of the narratives of rap, these sentiments are largely absent in this era.

The trend that is of the most concern and the most relevant to my central questions is the fact that the cultural products of this era are more likely to affirm hegemony and less likely to counter hegemony. The funny thing about this is the dramatic turn around in comparison with the *gutta period*. Instead of there being an intermediate period between the two eras, there is a sudden decline in the counter-hegemonic potency of the rap albums of this time. It should be kept in mind that the mean score of the *gutta period* was found to be 1.87, while the same score for the *commercial period* ended up being 1.09. Although it may not appear to be a dramatic difference, if you consider the scale of the data used to come up with these mean scores, it is a significant contrast. When the strength of the counter-hegemonic response is considered, the trends outlined become clearer. For instance, the cultural products of this time are more likely to directly as well as indirectly affirm hegemony, on the other hand, they are less likely to directly counter hegemony. If one expects for rap music to have a significant amount of counter-hegemonic elements weaved throughout the music, it is clear that the music associated with this era is going in the wrong direction, both ways.

Anyone observing these trends can't help but wonder what are the reasons behind such a dramatic turn around when it comes to the counter-hegemonic potency of rap. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a sufficient answer to this question, but I speculate that a lot of it has to do with the consolidation of a variety of independent labels under the umbrella of a few major distributors. The number one distributor of rap albums, according to *Billboard* magazine, is the Universal Music Group. The ironic thing about this is when a well-known beef in rap circles developed between 50 Cent and Ja Rule, Universal capitalized on the album sells of both of these artists. Another factor

that may have come into play is the popularity of rap music with mainstream White America, especially the White youth. With rap being so popular with this social group, those in elite positions within the major distributors more than likely decide to distribute and market the cultural products they deem to be the most lucrative, with such a decision being made in reference to the White majority, not the inner-city communities from which rap music is rooted.

The Fundamental Trend

The most fundamental trend that goes across all time periods, is the fact that rap music overwhelmingly consists of weakly counter-hegemonic cultural products. 75.5% of the rap albums sampled fell within this category, which includes the albums that are between a score of .01 and 2.9. This supports my assumption, and the assumptions of a slight majority of scholars who have written about rap, that rap music's counter-hegemonic potency is compromised by its position within the music industry and the economic structure at large, but elements of cultural resistance still exist. Although there are elements within rap that affirm hegemony, these elements only account for 3.3%, while the elements that contest hegemony account for 23.4%, which means that the vast majority of the subject matter found in rap is neutral (73.3%) when it comes to hegemony. If you eliminate the neutral elements, these percentages go from 3.3% to 12.7% when it comes to the elements that affirm hegemony and from 23.4% to 87.3% when it comes to those that contest hegemony. Providing more credence to this perspective on rap is the fact that, as stated previously, 12.7% of the elements found in

rap either directly or indirectly affirm hegemony. Only 9.5% directly counter hegemony, while an overwhelming 77.8% indirectly counter hegemony. Again, these percentages are based on the elimination of all the neutral scores.

The fundamental thing one can say about rap music, based upon these observations is that rap throughout its incorporation into the music industry at large has retained some of the counter-hegemonic elements that one would expect to find in a musical genre that emerged from Hip Hop culture. A culture that came into being through the need of the marginalized Black and Latino youth of New York City to reaffirm themselves in ways that weren't available to them through the mainstream, suburban culture of post-industrial America. The period in which these counter-hegemonic cultural products reached an apex is the time from 1992 - 1998, a period that I consider the *gutta period*. This era was followed by the *commercial period*, in which the counter-hegemonic potency of the rap at this time took a dramatic downturn. The *commercial period* is characterized by two trends that have directly caused this downturn, which is an increase in the presence of elements that affirm hegemony both directly and indirectly and the absence of elements that directly counter hegemony. For those who hope that rap will some day serve as the basis for a progressive social movement, these trends are troubling.

The analysis employed to yield these results was premised by a slight revision that was necessary to truly understand the nature of hegemony. This revision was one that rejected the notion that the basis of hegemony is a form of domination based on an ideological consensus. Such a perspective does not duly account for the human agency

of subordinate groups and overestimates the ability of the dominant elites to manipulate the public. The true nature of and the power of hegemony does not lie in its ability to convince the general population that their ideology is the best offered, or the one that is the most reflective of reality. The real power of hegemony as a social force lies in its ability to draw upon vast material, institutional, and political resources to articulate ideologies that consist of inter-subjective sentiments that are presented to the public as objective facts. These “objective facts” are in reality monopolized truth claims that are systematically articulated with the aid of the vast resources that the dominant elites draw upon. The ideological aspect of hegemony serves two functions, systematically articulating the truth claims of the dominant group and presenting the alternative truth claims that come to light as dangerous, hostile, un-American, or impractical.

This revised conception of hegemony and the incorporation of operational measures that could pinpoint culturally assertive sentiments served as the basis by which each rap album was evaluated. There are sure to be a number of ways by which the counter-hegemonic potency of rap could be evaluated but I contend that the operational measures employed provide us with adequate tools to properly evaluate the ability of rap music to contest hegemony.

There are numerous areas of inquiry that can be exploited to shed more light on the epistemological questions that may arise from this study. For example, one could evaluate, using various methods, whether my speculative notion that the decline in rap’s counter-hegemonic potency can be traced to the consolidation of various independent labels into fewer and fewer major distributing labels is factual or not. Another area of inquiry may be research geared toward comparing the level of investment between the

cultural products that are associated with gangsta rap and those associated with conscious rap. In other words, a study could be focused on whether there is a difference in the commitment of the major labels to distribute conscious rap, compared to gangsta rap. Another approach may be to go deeper into questions of gender and uncover the reason behind the increase of narratives that presented relationships between men and women as adversarial and exploitative. Finally, an effort should be made to expand upon these findings by evaluating how the trends associated with the *commercial period* may impact race relations.

To sum up, this thesis sought to answer two straightforward questions and the systematic analysis used gave us some straightforward answers. Yes, rap's relationship to hegemony has changed and this change is characterized by a progressive upsurge in the counter-hegemonic potency of rap, and then a sudden decline in the degree to which rap has countered hegemony.

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