

Beat Streets in the Global Hood: Connective Marginalities of the Hip Hop Globe

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Public Enemy showed us that Rap music is not afraid of subjects connected with national and race issues. We started to see how powerful Rap could be if it were used in expressing our attitudes. The kind of lyrics and consciousness that reveals the whole process of civilization, which is the story of dominance.

—Benjamin, Croatian fan of rap group Public Enemy¹

At the beginning of the twenty-first century and the third millennium the term “global village” has become a cliché. The telecommunications revolution has situated us in an Information Age that is proliferated with various high-technology media: cellular telephones, web television, over fifty national cable television channels including interactive ZDTV, computer-mediated communication through the Internet with chat rooms of fictitiously-constructed identities, speech technologies that allow for computing between different languages, and instantaneous satellite-projected news stories throughout the planet, just to name a few. The concept of global virtual reality is no longer a vision of a few computer hackers, but is fast-becoming a household phenomenon.

A concomitant global pop culture, based in music and dance videos, simulcasts of rock concerts throughout the major metropolises, and an intensely-marketed “modern” lifestyle through all manner of brand names and symbols of consumer goods, clothes, athletic shoes, and head gear are the materiality of a global youth-oriented culture. Young people throughout the planet, in their formative stages of puberty and beyond, are particularly affected by this fast-paced-MTV-sound-byte-information-glutted age that is at the center of the increasingly homogenized post-modernization process.

African American music, dance, and style, at the epicenter of American culture, are not only

part of this technology-mediated global youth culture, but are absolutely essential to it. Black music and the dances that depict the changing “afro-sonic” styles are bought and sold in the exigencies of a global supply-and-demand capitalist marketplace on a daily basis. Music legend Quincy Jones remembers that

When the tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins recorded “Body and Soul” it took from 1939 to 1953 to get the word around the world that the song was out. Today, you have instantaneous releases by satellite. (10E)

In today’s world “neosoul” artist D’Angelo can be marketed to new touring sites in South East Asia, just as rapper Hammer was in Russia in the early nineties, and just as Barry Gordy’s Motown recording artists were to the Western European market thirty years before either of them.

The steadily increasing extension of black music’s influence is part of the United States becoming the world power. However, black music’s global influence is also due to it being “the most unique cultural product...” as Cornel West recognizes, “created by Americans of any hue” (Kruger and Mariani 94). Along with global marketing strategies of the American music industry, for better or worse, American values and lifestyles in all of their diversity have followed. Black popular culture today is even more snared in larger economic vicissitudes—it is what sells to more people than ever before—while simultaneously being at the nucleus of a postmodern web of control over global social narratives of identity.

The most invading of black music in the last twenty years has been rap. Global hip hop youth culture has become a phenomenon in the truest sense of the word and has affected nearly every country on the map. William Eric Perkins, editor

of the seminal scholarly anthology *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap and Hip Hop Culture* (1996), explains that

the hip hop revolution is just that, an uprooting of the old way in style and culture, and the introduction of a taste of black and Latino urban authenticity to every corner of the globe. (257)

Nelson George, in his new *Hip Hop America*, extols the persuasiveness of hip hop culture:

From Vancouver and Toronto in Canada, to Dakar in Senegal, to Holland, to Cuba's Havana, to every place satellites beam music videos and CDs are sold (or bootlegged or counterfeited), hip hop has made an impression. (206)

What started in the South Bronx in the mid-1970s among African American and Jamaican-born DJs as party-music, using new turntable technology with booming base sounds in the percussive "breaks" of the recorded songs, has proliferated to places as diverse as New Zealand, Sénégal, South Africa, Mexico, Germany, Russia, France, England, India, and Japan. Global technology and African American culture have indeed formed a mutually sustaining MuLuhanian message-in-the-medium that is facilitated by cultural interpenetration.

My opening epigraph by the Croatian rap fan of Public Enemy demonstrates the international influence of rap music in our contemporary world. Although rap music is situated in the continuum of historical exportation of American pop music, hip hop as a culture, has interjected its own often self-empowered messages and attitudes that are not necessarily under the control of the music industry. Rap's dense, poetic, lyric content is often underpinned by African American messages about an historical marginalized status. Socially relevant content of some rap groups coupled with hip hop's driving rhythmic beat resonates with youth internationally. This is exactly what the Croatian Public Enemy fan means when he says, "We started to see how powerful Rap could be if it were used in expressing our attitudes." Ethnomusicologist David Badagnani has found that,

Many other oppressed or minority people around the world have recognized a very strong parallel between their social situation to that of black Americans.... Any time people do rap in any foreign countries they have an acknowledged indebtedness to black-American culture. (Antonucci G10)

Of course, not all of rap's content is about exploring social marginalizations, racial or otherwise. Many young men and women, particularly emcees (rappers) in their teens and twenties, are focused on sex and the opposite sex, or just "fighting for your right to party," as the Beastie Boys' 1986 hit told us. Still other forms, such as what the media first tagged as "gangsta" rap, reflect the increasing violence and gangs in dilapidated black and Latino lower-income communities. However, rap groups from the early days like Public Enemy, Brand Nubian, Queen Latifah, and the now defunct A Tribe Called Quest, spread Afrocentric, probing, and street-wise raps that inculcated messages of social consciousness globally. Today's emcees like The Roots and Lauryn Hill, through international tours, continue this self-empowering wing of hip hop that began in the late 1980s. The so-called conscious brand of rap music motivates youth internationally to explore their own issues of marginalization in the hip hop "underground," which continues to evade the dominant pop culture industries.

Hip hop's connective marginalities, as I call them, are social resonances between black expressive culture within its contextual political history and similar dynamics in other nations. Connections or resonances can take the form of culture itself (Jamaica and Cuba), class (North African Arabs in France), historical oppression, (Native Hawaiians in Hawaii), or simply the discursive construction of "youth" as a peripheral social status (Japan). Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Williard, editors of *Generations of Youth* (1998), remind us that the term youth can become "a metaphor for perceived social change and its projected consequences, as such it is an enduring locus for displaced social anxieties" (1). Along these lines, rap is an in-your-face rebellious youth style that does challenge the adult status quo. The generational dynamic of this subculture remains, even as hip hop "heads" themselves grow older.

However, rap music and the entire expressive culture of hip hop resonate not only with the anxiety of youthful social rebellion, but extant global socio-political inequities as well.

Rapper Chuck D is one who has been responsible for rap's world wide proliferation and who *Time* magazine called "The Commissioner of Rap." In his own book *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality* (1997), he records the political resonance that connects youth all over the world to some of rap's messages.

In my travels around the planet, I've continually heard stories of oppression and stories of the rich trying to beat down the poor. Black people suffer globally from white supremacy because we're easily identifiable, so we're used as pawns in the game. But I've witnessed other pawns in the game. In countries where there's not a large population of Black people, they find a way to make people the scapegoat based on religious, ethnic, or cultural differences. (57-58)

In the United States, the national community of hip hop insiders is called the Hip Hop Nation, but in the new millennium over 25 years since its inception in the South Bronx, I have come to recognize this subculture as the Hip Hop Globe. This U.S. subculture truly has a diaspora that is, in fact, shifting the global center and the margins through youth's participation in popular culture. Hip hop, as an extension of African American popular culture, then, becomes a global signifier for many forms of marginalizations. In each case "blackness" and its perceived status is implicated as a global sign. Together with the aesthetics of the music in low-register bass drum beats, whether digitized or played live, these rapped messages of hip hop have created a worldwide cultural phenomenon that we are only beginning to fathom.

Connective Marginalities: Hip Hop Around the World

From global street culture to the World Wide Web, hip hop culture is not difficult to locate. The Internet provides copious sites across the map where one can travel to diverse international hip hop scenes at the click of a computer mouse in the comfort of one's own home. One can visit some of the chief spokespersons for each country's subculture and find out about underground independent record labels (indies), current rap

groups, and b-boy (breakdance) crews, as well as chat about local hip hop controversies and variants on the culture.² If traveling, one cannot choose an international vacation spot or journey to a city on business and not find hip hop culture, usually containing the sounds and movements of the American originators spiced with local flavor. Even localities that are continually in the throws of guerrilla warfare take time out for hip hop. For example, New York rapper Puff Daddy's music pumps out of passing cars, as "teenagers wearing baggy pants and backward-facing baseball caps...and Palestinian women dressed in traditional embroidered robes" walk the same streets in Ramallah, West Bank, Gaza strip (Abumaraq A8). Hip hop's global resonance reflects connective marginalities both in sites that one might anticipate as well as the less expected.

Spanish rap is becoming commonplace throughout the U.S., the Caribbean, and South America, with local emcees rising to celebrity status in their local communities and native countries. Mangu, in the Dominican Republic, raps about the dangers of Dominican drug dealing. Rapper P. de Jesus Carriello, who is a part of the rap duo Sandy y Pepo, is utilized by the Colombian government to do state commercials with Caribbean flavored rap music. Miami, now a city that is a cultural cross between the U.S. and the Caribbean, boasts among its rappers DJ Laz (Lazaro Mendez), a Cuban American who raps in Spanish over *merengue* rhythms, long a musical staple throughout the Caribbean.³ In Sao Palo, Brazil, an emcee called Thiade has been immortalized in Francisco Cesar's documentary film, *Hip Hop SP* (1990). Thiade raps in Portuguese on a street corner, demonstrating Sao Palo's full-blown street culture, replete with b-boys and b-girls that combine hip hop dance and Brazilian capoeira martial art. Besides obvious issues of class and historical oppression, hip hop in South America and the Caribbean carries a strong cultural connective marginality that musically binds the Americas through African-derived rhythms.

Toronto, Canada, being in proximity to the U.S. East Coast for example, has had access to some of the seminal emcees and breakers, enjoying a long term relationship with hip hop culture. Toronto deejay Ron Nelson has produced many successful concerts in that city with some of New York's best, such as Run DMC, Public Enemy,

KRS-One, and Big Daddy Kane. This in turn has spawned local Canadian emcees Ken E. Krush and Dream Warriors, as well as breakers and graffiti artists, particularly in the Toronto suburbs of Scarborough and Mississauga (Spady 233-34).

Dakar, Sénégal's capital, has one of the most prolific hip hop scenes on the continent of Africa. The internationally-famous Senegalese pop singer Youssou N'Dour has built a state-of-the-art recording studio that he rents cheaply to local rappers who crave their first quality recording. N'Dour has stated that he hopes his studio will stem the tide of West African pop singers having to record in Europe. Dakar has spawned its own rap groups including Pee Froiss and the internationally-recognized Positive Black Soul (PBS). Simultaneously, hip hop culture in Dakar poses the same issue of "modern" versus "traditional" cultures that the subculture does everywhere else.

A generation born in this burgeoning city since Senegal gained independence from France has cut its ties to the rural villages that Mr. N'Dour sings about and holds none of his romantic affection for them.... Sometimes during the day the thumping bass emanating from the building [Hyperson studio where PBS records] competes with wailing Islamic chants from the open-air mosque across the street. (Walt E2)

Yet on the other hand, Africa has a special relationship to hip hop: the orality of rap has deep roots in traditional chanting and performative traditions such as the *griots* of West Africa. The indigenous and the global blend in complex, and often incongruent, harmonies that hearken to a postmodern era in flux.

An age of increasing complexity has been created by juxtapositions of local cultures and exported postmodernity from the primary global power, the continental United States. As George Lipsitz (1990) observes, "Mass communications and culture rely on an ever-expanding supply of free-floating symbols only loosely connected to social life." However, for indigenous cultures these signs endure as "important icons of alienated identity," now partially in collision with the production and distributions of market-manipulated symbols. However, as Lipsitz also reminds us, "this 'postmodern' culture allows the residues of many historical cultures to float above us,

'ragged but beautiful,' never quite existing and never quite vanishing" (134-35). Twentieth-century guiding narratives are in dialogue with early 21st-century technology, multi-media, and commodified pop culture; they are all subsumed by all-pervasive late capitalism. Even countries that have consciously tried to isolate themselves from Western youth-culture, such as India and China, have been invaded by MTV video satellite signals. For example, in the early 1990s, India produced a rapper, former pop singer Baba Sehgal, who became well known by covering white American rapper Vanilla Ice's "Ice Ice Baby" using Hindi lyrics (Gargan B22). In the world of global pop culture, compounded appropriations abound, complicating the racial arguments of cultural appropriation in the U.S.

My conceptual frame of connective marginalities, encompassing the gamut of culture, class, historical oppression, and generation can be understood more clearly by elaborating upon a few international sites. Toward an agenda of deeper explication, I explore Russia, Japan, and Hawaii. Hip hop youth culture over the last fifteen years has grown internationally to the point that each site deserves its own chapter in global hip hop to better reveal critical ambiguities and complexities that are naturally imbedded in issues of local histories in relation to cultural hybridity or intertext. However, the following three national "snapshots" of hip hop particularity do offer some insights into how the local and the global spheres interface through this youth culture's varying connective marginalities.

Russians Bustin' Loose with Hammer

The former Soviet Union, fifteen years ago deemed the "evil empire" by then President Ronald Reagan, seems the least likely to have adopted hip hop culture. Yet, the youth subculture has invaded Russia despite checkered U.S.-Soviet relations. Hip hop roots in Russia span over a decade, beginning in the early 1990s with groups such as Raketa (Rocket) that used rap to emphasize non-political, human elements of the Russian space program such as the first cosmonaut dogs. Another group Malchishniki (The Bachelors), not unlike their American gangsta-rapper counterparts, rapped about petty crime and aggressive sex. Superstar Bogadan Titomir, who drew crowds of up to 12,000, once inspired a whole new fash-

ion trend with his multiple-zippered leather jacket and harem-style pants, which Oakland-based rapper Hammer had made famous during the early 1990s. Hammer had, in turn, modeled his “harem” pants on a West African male garment that is worn in the S n -Gambia, Guinea, and Mali regions. As an ironic and humorous post-script to former American-Russian competition, which also speaks about today’s American economic and cultural hegemony, Titomir “often stops by Moscow’s McDonalds to chat with his fans” (Erlanger B22).

Russia’s appropriation of black hip hop has been particularly blatant and heavy-handed, extending to top political officials. Then Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin hired the Oakland, California-based Hammer to enliven his stodgy political image. Hammer’s funky, danceable rap style and hip hop fashion had obviously become very popular among Russian youth, and therefore he became the perfect artist to upgrade Chernomyrdin’s appeal to the younger generation, who enjoy growing clout in the new Russia.⁴ After the demise of seventy years of Communist rule, Russian politics today is obviously in severe flux and the economy is in a shambles. Russian political expert Michael McFaul observed in the *New York Times* that

except for the Communist Party, there is such weak party identity in Russia that candidates have to sell personalities, not political platforms. It becomes Hollywood glitzy—what personality can make [them] famous.

In the article, where McFaul was quoted, an ironic and ludicrous Russian political rally with Hammer as headliner was described:

Against a glowing red, white, and blue “Our Home is Russia” [the centrist political party] backdrop at the Rossiya concert hall, Hammer bellowed, “We feel like bustin’ loose!” His bewildered audience, mostly made of middle-aged Russian bureaucrats and campaign workers did not [do so]. (Stanley A1 and 8)

But, the power of Russian youth, who can “bust loose” as they become, to a degree, culturally merged with their black American counterparts, is evident.

Russian youth’s appropriation of hip hop culture sets new trends that an older political main-

stream obviously feels forced to follow. The identification with the youth signifier that hip hop represents conflates with their need to express a postmodern cool that, in turn, separates them from old-guard communists. Hip hop culture, represented in this case by Hammer in the mid-nineties, becomes implicated in the generational tensions as they interface with the politics of this particular nation-state.

The use of Hammer with chaotic Russian political campaigning demonstrates how rap artists can become pawns in the Americanization process of countries like the new Russia. Hammer was hired to perform three concerts, but was never informed that they would be within the context of Russian political campaigning. In fact, the *New York Times* article reports that he had never even heard of Mr. Chernomyrdin before touring to Russia. Hammer’s hip hop shows were in the context of what Russians called at that time their “cultural initiative” to “wake up the voters.” Interestingly enough, the “cultural initiative” also included other black music artists such as Kool and the Gang. However, most black American hip hop and R&B artists on the international touring circuit are not complaining about such obvious appropriation by international leaders who do not necessarily understand their artistic aesthetic or its history in the United States. In Hammer’s case, as long as the Russian political party put touring dollars in his pockets, the financially-beleaguered artist from Oakland, California, cares little about Russian intent.⁵ It becomes a case of who is using whom?

The vicissitudes of cultural appropriation in the international hip hop arena are convoluted by cross-cultural variances that reflect global conceptions of race and pop culture trends. For example, Russian rap artist Aleksei Soloviev of Raketa is frank about his cultural mix as a white Russian when he modifies rap rhythms “to make it more techno-beat, more house music, a bit more European, because, after all, I’m white” (Erlanger B22). In Russia, the connective marginality with hip hop is youth pop music that signifies a break with the older generation; yet a resolute awareness of racial and cultural difference, vis- -vis black music, remains. Techno music, in reality a derivative of hip hop as it blended with disco, is perceived as “more white,” and therefore closer to Russian youths’ cultural sensibilities.

Rap music's initial origins in the poor, black and Latino Bronx ghetto cannot be replicated in countries like Russia, and as a result many geographic hip hop sites reflect historic American racialized ambivalence towards black contributions to world culture. This hip hop dynamic is unlike white

rock music [which] also made dramatic inroads in unlikely places, becoming a language for political dissidents even in the Soviet Union and China,... rap is branded by its origins. (Antonucci G10)

Yet despite these issues that signify the continual racial/class hierarchy of America and the world, black American rappers dominate the genre in the global music industry. African Americans confer "authenticity" to hip hop in its global proliferation.

Jigga Who?: Hip Hop, Japan-style

Japan offers a particularly interesting example of how American black cultural and socio-historical dynamics underpin hip hop youth culture. Hip hop subculture in Japan became active around 1987, and has even spawned indigenous rap and break dance communities throughout Asia in sites such as South Korea, Thailand, and Malaysia. However, there has been some debate about whether the Japanese translation of hip hop is more bandwagon kitsch, or whether there are, in fact, deeper socio-cultural dynamics. Although Japan has had several generations of avid consumers of black music and dance traditions from jazz to soul and funk, and now hip hop, issues of marginalization are not nearly the same for Japanese youth.

Japan's relative social comfort, built upon, some say, an illusory homogeneity, has created several "trivial" rappers by American standards: Scha-dara-parr sang "nonsense" lyrics in the early 1990s, the Geisha Girls who wear geisha costumes as male-drag rap shtick, and female rap star Yuri Ichii in the latter 1990s who has sold millions of albums throughout Asia. According to the *New York Times*, Ichii is a comfortable middle-class rap star and "in short, is not exactly an emblem of 'gangsta' rap." The article attempts to put some kind of context to rap in Asia: "rap on this side of the Pacific Ocean is a world apart from its counterpart in America, and the chasm

underscores the differences in youth values and popular culture" (Kristof A-4). Yet many Japanese youth, like young people throughout the globe, are attracted to hip hop's beat, and ironically the staccato quality of the Japanese language seems to fit well with rap's beat-box rhythm. While the rhythmic force may be persuasive, the content of American rap is another story.

[Although] American rap is notorious for hard-edged songs about sex and violence.... [I]n Asia there is almost no debate about Japanese rap lyrics, partly because Japanese have taken the beat of rap music and stuffed it with language that is as polite as Japan itself. (Kristof A-4)

Japanese youths' adoption of American rap has also challenged traditional Japanese perspectives on gender. When rap aesthetics and hip hop style are embraced, the acquiescence implicit in the ascribed "place" of the female is often contested by the signifier of rebellious youth. Yuri Ichii who, the article assesses, has a studied, sweet-sixteen image belying her mid-twenties age, is a prime example of the gendered use of hip hop. One of her songs, "Chase the Chance," speaks of the benign dilemma of many young Japanese females, previously more restrained, who are now trying to find their place in this youth-oriented global popular culture while coping with the demands of their own traditions:

You're taught to cooperate
and good girls can only be good girls.
But you've felt the beat
and there's nothing you can do
Just chase the chance.

Rap, Japanese-style, seems to offer a way out of the social limitations of polite traditional Japanese culture and its expectations of young women. Japanese high school students are particularly attracted to rap because of its renegade reputation: "It signifies a mild rebellion against the world of neckties and keigo, or formal language, that constricts adults" (Kristof A-4). Thus, American rap provides a release from a conformist Japanese lifestyle that does not seem to offer rebellious youth an avenue of individual expression. Resonance with hip hop culture in Japan is based on a vital youth signification as a marginalized

subculture, seeking to make its mark in the adult society by participating in the global postmodern youth phenomenon.

Another dimension of Japan's hip hop culture illuminates my earlier contention about global social narratives of black representation. Editor and cultural critic Joe Wood (1998) conducted extensive research into Japan's hip hop scene and its so-called "jiggers," an obvious variation of the infamous American "N" word. Like their white American suburban counterparts, the "wiggers," jiggers are Japanese teens, often in high school, who adopt an intense "black" identity through hip hop slang, designer baggy Lugz denims and sweat jackets by Tommy Hilfiger. They listen to American rap from old-schoolers like Eric B. and Rakim and KRS-One to new-school rap stars like the late Tupac Shakur and Nas. But jiggers, unlike the wiggers, play a "darkie" game by visiting tanning salons to blacken-up and often crimp their hair in an attempt to look more like their black American rap heroes. Woods (46) notes that

Jiggers come in several flavors. The most curious are undoubtedly the blackfacers, b-boys and girls who darken their skin with ultraviolet rays.... What...separates the small sect of blackfacers from their peers—even their hip-hopping peers—is the ardor with which they pursue African American "blackness." An obvious reversal of the function of blackface in American minstrelsy, jiggers literally "wear" black face in order to embrace black people.

These Japanese black wannabees frequent the hip hop nightclubs of the Roppongi district of Tokyo where many U.S. black service men and Africans living in Japan congregate.⁶ The ultimate goal of jigger girls is to attract a male *kokujin* (black foreigner). Wood titled his essay "The Yellow Negro," signifying that the cultural dynamics he found in Japan was somewhat akin to Norman Mailer's 1957 essay "The White Negro" in America (53). In doing so Wood poses a quandary about "subversive hipness" and the historic appropriation of black culture within which the globalization of hip hop often fits. In Japan, it should be noted, the young jiggers are actually thought to be not cool by most hip hoppers, because they have taken voyeurism to the extreme. The jiggers are actually a subculture within an endless array of subcultures of Japanese cool.

Indeed, DJ Krush, Japan's undisputed mix-master, who began deejaying in 1985 after he saw a performance of old-school rappers on tour from the 1982 film *Wild Style*, takes major offense at jiggers even being considered as real hip hop culture.

Not only do they put on black paint, or dark foundations, or go to tanning salons; they also have their hair done in dreadlocks. And I find it is an incredible insult.... It's only the young people who do this because they care about the externals of hip-hop, not the internals. Unless the kids perceive that they just can't go around imitating and carbon copying black rappers, the Japanese hip hop scene is not going to grow.⁷

DJ Krush personally illustrates an organic version of Japan's relationship to black culture. His "father listened to a great deal of James Brown and Miles Davis," creating a family sensibility toward black musical aesthetics that did not just begin in the hip hop era. His perceptions about the external-internal dichotomy of culture—material vs. ideational attributes—reveal the insidious nature of global capitalism that thrives on external imitation through conspicuous consumption. Global commodification promotes a vacuous "jigger-like" cultural appropriation that can only be termed imitation at best and sycophantic voyeurism at worst. The Japanese media's term for the endless array of black-oriented subcultures in the country is *kokujin ni naritai wakamono* (young people who want to be black). Media terminology follows social phenomena: young Japanese's fascination with black expressive culture has become a major cultural force to be interpreted by the mainstream.⁸ Given the U.S. history of blackface minstrelsy, at the beginning of the 21st century "blackness" becomes simultaneously demonized and reified, like grinning bookends of Du Bois's 20th century prediction of the problem of the color line. Neither processes of fetishization attempts to fathom the complexity of the highly creative people producing the objectified image.

Hawaii: Marginality of Historic Oppression

By virtue of Hawaii's colonial ties to the U.S. mainland and its unique geographic position as a crossroads between East and West, the fiftieth state offers another complex example of the glob-

alization of hip hop culture. Hawaii is the gateway to the Pacific Rim—the mid-way point between the United States mainland and Asia—making it an interesting composite of Native Hawaiian, American, and Asian cultural factors. Hawaii floats geographically and culturally in the vast region we call the Pacific Rim, connecting the Pacific region in historical and contemporary ways. Given its geo-political context and its cultural mix, ethnicity and identity, popular music and dance, as well as commercialism and commodification encompass complex relationships that include today's hip hop generation in the Hawaiian Islands.⁹

A microcosmic view of a few artists illuminates the influence of American popular culture through the capitalist media, as well as the connections between African American culture's ongoing issues of identity and those of other historically oppressed peoples. Kutmaster Spaz, a twenty-eight year old hip hop deejay on the island of Oahu, is a result of the 80s hip hop dance craze. He performed the famous "poppin' and lockin'" styles as a teen, during the mid-80s Hollywood breakdance film era, that helped spawn the craze. His birth name, Derrick Kamo-hoali'i Bulatao, reflects his Hawaiian, Filipino, and Caucasian ethnicities that are typical of the local mixture in Hawaii. Starting breakdance at age ten, he evolved into a serious professional hip hop deejay by age seventeen, and today hosts a weekend hip hop show on Xtreme Radio Hawaii records rap for Hawaii's Landmark Entertainment. He interprets the early days of Hawaiian hip hop and the scene's transformation over time:

Back in the day, people in Hawaii felt they had to act a certain way to be hip hop. The best example is that the kids [then] felt like they had to wear the Africa red, green and yellow medallions, not even knowin' what it stood for. But *now* they wear kukui nuts [made into leis] and show pride in their [*own*] heritage.¹⁰

Mimicry of mainland black style evolving to a more "authentic" Hawaiian adaptation is a predictable trajectory. Kutmaster Spaz's Hawaiian hip hop story and DJ Krush's analysis of the dynamics of the Japanese hip hop scene are indicative of the process of cultural maturation as hip hop demonstrates its global longevity. As generation X has matured into adults, so has its

internalization of the hip hop philosophy of "keeping it real." The process is just beginning in Hawaii as it is for many international sites at the beginning of the 21st century.

Links between the displacement issues of Hawaiians and African Americans point to their general bond as historically-oppressed peoples; these bonds are revived by today's global hip hop phenomenon. Hawaii's most recognized rap group makes this point clear. Sudden Rush, a Hawaiian rap group from the Big Island, grasp their historic bonds of oppression with black Americans and allude to them within their strong pro-sovereignty rap messages. In 1997, the group premiered their second CD, *Ku'e!!* (to oppose, resist, stand different). Situating their artistic approach within a Hawaiian context, rather than an appropriated imitation of mainland style, the compilation of strongly-political jams is an important step, content-wise, in the hip hop movement in the Hawaiian islands. On track one, "True Hawaiian," they position the political hegemony in the Pacific within the last five hundred years of the displacement of people of color:

They tell us that we're equal
But if you look at history, we're just another sequel
Started with America, built from desecration
They called the Indians savages
and threw 'em on reservations
Then they took the African man from the motherland
To this other land to work for the master's plan
That wasn't enough
They had to cross the big blue
And they saw Hawaii, oh yeah, they took that too
They saw the hula and called it paganistic
But they didn't think twice
when they were raping the Pacific.¹¹

Historical domination of the Indian, African, and Hawaiian are clearly juxtaposed as a part of the same "progress" ethos of European imperialism. Sudden Rush, particularly with their use of black style along with the Hawaiian language, represents the best of the Hawaiian dialogue with part of the African American agenda taking place within global hip hop. Their raps signify a connective marginality of historical oppression. Sudden Rush's use of black representation illuminates a common world oppression of people of color that echoes another trajectory of DuBois's message

about the 20th century. Hawaii, Japan, and Russia offer three different examples of the usage of hip hop youth culture. Sociopolitical history of each site in the hip hop diaspora affects that country's aesthetic emphases on race, culture, class, and oftentimes gender.

Conclusions

This essay illustrates some of the postmodern dynamics of contemporary global hip hop culture and its widely-ranging international use of black culture. American "blackness," through hip hop culture, is exported as an intertextual modern and global culture of cool. Temporal and spatial trajectories of black culture position it at the center of global social narratives of representation of identity for youth. Stuart Hall (230) contends that when

"Difference" has been marked[,] how it is then interpreted is a constant and recurring preoccupation in the representation of people who are racially and ethnically different from the majority population. Difference signifies. It "speaks."

Otherness and the representation of the meanings of blackness, already complex within the historic context of American racism, encompasses even more convoluted subjectivities within the global context. International meanings of black identity, signified through hip hop, compound issues of race and power relations when filtered through various other countries' issues of marginality and difference. Black cultural production has proceeded along predictable lines dictated by its own intrinsic aesthetic and philosophical principles. Technology and economics, however, have occasioned new and provocative demands for its context in the new millennium. Rap, as the most popular music emanating from the hegemonic American music industry, is utterly implicated in this morass.¹

Although space has not allowed me to explore many important international hip hop sites, such as France, Sénégal, and Brazil, the three nations/cultures touched upon in this essay offer insights into the widely-varying approaches and utilization of hip hop culture across the map. Russian youth seem particularly self-conscious about their whiteness vis-à-vis their appropriation

of black rap and hip hop style. However, the Soviet politicians, who could not "bust loose" in a hip hop manner, blatantly "bought" rappers like Hammer to get Russian youth support. Japan's DJ Krush, in his reaction to the jigger mimesis phenomenon, offered insights into a self-authenticating and validating process predicated on an internalizing of black aesthetics. His perception is based on culture as intertext and its evolution as a continual reforming process. A potential salutary cultural appropriation process, as black performance aesthetics becomes globally pervasive, is at the heart of the internationalization of hip hop youth culture, even as it interfaces with other historical, economic, technological, and social issues. Hawaii's Sudden Rush view themselves as cultural workers for liberation, a paradigm that has been crucial to many freedom movements throughout the globe. According to Richard Schaul's 1993 Foreword, history as a problem to be actively worked out and acted upon in order "to overcome that which is dehumanizing" was the overriding concept behind Páblo Freire's seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (14). Message rappers, from Public Enemy to Lauryn Hill to those in the hip hop diaspora like Sudden Rush, are vitally-affecting pedagogues who augment cultural and political awareness as artists of conscience and consciousness. Music artists who take a political stand, while avoiding didacticism, can be crucial counter-hegemonic forces.

Simultaneously, I am quite aware that, as James Clifford asserts, "local" can be a relative term. In his *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (19) he asks, "How is significant difference politically articulated, and challenged? Who determines where (and when) a community draws its lines, names its insiders and outsiders?"¹³ In fact, I interchangeably conceive of hip hop as a culture and a subculture. Although it is often perceived as marginal by the mainstream of many societies, it is central to several generations cross-culturally, as well as to today's global commodification. Its boundaries are very fluid in many respects. Ultimately, my own cherished research methodology can be viewed as constituting the very subject I am attempting to study. Yet, I found hip hop youths to be very comfortable with their own ambiguities and the seem-

ing contradictions within their culture. Hip hop's complexity, in itself, creates its own story, and in the process eliminates any one neat and tidy theory that could contain or solely represent its nature.

As each international site works out its own intertextual relationship with hip hop culture, it provides a passport, a conceptual ticket to travel across America's racial divide to critically engage not just the Hip Hop Nation, but the Hip Hop Globe. Each hip hop diasporic site has its own issues based on national culture and history, historical relation to the United States, and its own perceptions of African Americans. The hip hop passport is not a ticket to a pollyanna Disney World, but rather it is a cultural bridge to explore other hip hop sites inhabited by young people who have their own issues of marginalization, be they class, culture, historical oppression, or simply being youths in an adult-dominated world. Global hip hop culture becomes a vital pathway through which these connective marginalities can be engaged and explored. At the beginning of the new millennium, hip hop culture provides a perpetual source of individual and cultural discovery for youth, as the world, in spite of itself, through them, dances toward a global village.

Notes

¹Quoted in Chuck D, *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality*. New York: Delacorte P, 1997.

²The term "underground" in hip hop refers to the non-commercial means of production and distribution of CDs and remix tapes, as well as the less commodified break dance and graffiti communities. It is a widely used term that encompasses many levels of the non-commercial arena of rap including the smaller record labels that handle their own world-wide distribution for artists who don't want to or have not yet signed with one of the major record labels.

³I would like to thank scholar and dancer Celeste Frazer Delgado of Miami for information about music by these three emcees, and about Spanish speaking rap in general.

⁴For a recent study that places Hammer's hip hop dance style in specific black dance tradition that reaches back to slavery, see W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998.

⁵Although Hammer has been credited with introducing melody and dance to rap in the late 80s, he seems to have been a victim of hardcore rap fans' scathing indictment of him as a "glitzy sell-out," and his own financial mismanagement. After reportedly earning \$33 million between 1990-91, he became legally bankrupt by the late 90s. However, in 1999 he attempted to make a comeback, emphasizing Christian rap themes. See Lee Hildebrand, "Anatomy of a Bad Rap: The Rise and Fall of MC Hammer," *East Bay Express* 9 Oct. 1998, 32-3.

⁶Wood explains that there is a significant population of Africans from Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria living in Tokyo. They are the owners of the popular black clubs frequented by Black U.S. servicemen. He also explains that the businesses must be recorded in the Africans' Japanese wives' names, "in compliance with Japanese law."

⁷Spence D, "Dancer's Delight: Interview with DJ Krush," duplicated from *The Bomb* 43 (1995). Online. Internet. 12 Sept. 1998. <http://www.msu.edu/user/okumurak/n>.

⁸Although different in usage, a fetishizing of "blackness" is created by blackface jiggers, just as it was by 19th century white American minstrels like Al Jolson and Harlan Dixon. Minstrelsy provided a humorous, but degrading, psychic release from the caste of race in America in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Today's global hip hop stage provides Japanese blackfacers, speaking ko-gyaru-go, with a psychic release that is based in Japan's generation gap.

⁹Predominantly my hip hop field study has been Hawaii. I conducted extensive research on the hip hop scenes on Oahu and the Big Island from 1997-1999, receiving an Individual Research Grant from the Hawaii Committee for the Humanities to study high school age youth. The school study was supplemented by interviews with hip hop professionals throughout the two year period.

¹⁰Kutmaster Spaz (spaz@xtremeradiohawaii.com) "Hip Hop Interview." E-mail to author. 2 March 1999.

¹¹Sudden Rush, "True Hawaiian." *Ku'e!!*, Way Out West Enterprises, WOWCD 9702, 1997.

¹²According to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), from 1987 to 1997 hip hop's market share of all pop music sold increased ten percent. This represented a 150% increase as compared to a 13.7% decrease for rock music during the same period.

¹³I would like to thank Professor Mark Helbling of the University of Hawaii at Manoa's Department of American Studies for sharing this reference with me.

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